Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/closedallnight0000paul

CLOSED ALL NIGHT

By the Same Author

OPEN ALL NIGHT

GREEN SHOOTS

CLOSED ALL NIGHT

BY PAUL MORAND

NEW YORK
THOMAS SELTZER
1925

Copyright, 1925, by
THOMAS SELTZER, Inc.

All rights reserved

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Translated by G. P. C., C. B. P., and H. M.
from the French FERMÉ LA NUIT.

CONTENTS

	Page
THE NIGHT AT PORTOFINO-KULM	11
THE NIGHT IN CHARLOTTENBURG	81
THE NIGHT IN BABYLON	113
THE NIGHT AT PUTNEY	145

THE NIGHT AT PORTOFINO-KULM

THE NIGHT AT PORTOFINO-KULM

I TOOK an express lift, shaped like a state coach, which landed me without stopping at the right floor. Then came a long velvet-pile footpath. Thirty yards of black trunks, like sample cases, marked "J. P. O'P." with green stripes. Suddenly a dam of orchids, lilies, azaleas, over which hovered a few dragon-flies with gilt antennæ, bearing on their wings the addresses of Greek florists; just as in the corridors of nursing homes, where they exile flowers at night lest they should do the patients harm. At No. 1619 an entry led to three doors. I read a placard: "Not in the bedroom." With European discretion, I knocked. None of the sounds I heard seemed a reply. I decided on the left-hand door. It was the bathroom, and was used as a record office: the bath was full of letters and documents; there was a typewriter on the closet seat. The arrangement of the mirrors obliged me not to withdraw, and, by advancing into the bedroom,

to acknowledge my presence, which they had already betrayed.

Surrounded by several persons, in a disordered bed like a linen waterfall, the pillows flattened out by the weight of his head, lay O'Patah. I recognised his eyes. The *New York American* was at the time running a competition on celebrated eyes, and each morning one had to guess the owners of all these pupils, burning or misty. O'Patah's were easily recognisable, dynamic, shooting straight out like a jet from a siphon. With the greatest difficulty the French hotel barber, Marius Calvaire, was waving his hair, so close that it looked like an astrakhan cap.

"A little bandoline, Maître?"

The cosmetic was crackling and smoking for the sacrifice: the victim cried like a calf under the branding-iron.

"What a head of hair to have at your age! You can at least be sure of dying without needing a wig."

"From father to son," said O'Patah, "hair that turns the scissors' edge has run in our family."

The telephone rang without respite, but no one took any notice.

In spite of the pomp of this vertical hotel, the

room had transformed itself into the attic of an old student. There are certain triumphant beings who instantly set the stamp of their personalities on the things about them, their dogs, their trousers, their wives. O'Patah's room was in his own image, turbulent, sordid, and exalted.

Four o'clock in the afternoon: daylight had already retreated from the lower floors, pursued by high-power electricity. O'Patah lay flat, his spectacles lost in the crumpled sheets which failed to hide his dirty naked feet. On the table, which was drawn up to the bed, an opened bottle of purgative, scraps of paper covered with notes and verses written in the dark at night, an electric machine for drying the hair like a clown's revolver, and a group of those cup-and-ball toys in diminishing sizes. On the floor, toilet-paper and the whole of the New York-Irish press, giving in huge capitals the details of the celebrated Gaelic poet's landing on Long Island the previous evening.

In the wall, a hatch surmounted by a notice: "Dirty shoes should be put here for cleaning," had been turned into an oratory by O'Patah, in honour of the month of Mary, with blue candles and an image of the Virgin. Behind the bolster

was pinned a flag bearing the words: "God save Ireland."

A young priest, his hair a convincing imitation of gold, with a rosy tonsure and a black waistcoat romantically buttoned up tight to the neck, was seated on the bed, reading the Gospels to O'Patah. He got up on seeing me.

"The press will be received in a body before dinner," he said to me.

He looked at my shoes, then at my walking-stick, and burst out laughing.

"Put that down over there. You'll break something."

Doubtless he perceived nothing but humility in my eyes, with not a gleam of inquiry, for he at once rejected the idea of taking me for a journalist.

"If you have come to ask for money, write. If for autographs, Thursday afternoons; if to make a donation, it should be handed in at the Equitable during the day, during the night at the hotel office."

The priest explained all this to me with much play of the hands and sleeves. I am sure he could put the sins into a hat and flutter them out again as holy doves, together with American silk flags. He himself was like one of those useful birds

which live on monster animals, picking their lice or their teeth.

I presented my card. He handed it to O'Patah.

"French, young gentleman? A friendly and allied froggy?"

"I have not come as everybody else does, Maître, to make you offers of army cloth, f.o.b. or of an option on a batch of old rifles, with delivery at the port of Galway. Chance has ordained that I should be mobilised in the United States. My profession is sculpture. I have come to make my homage to a great Celtic ally in the person of the most renowned and the last of the Irish bards, yourself, and to ask your leave to model your head and shoulders."

Marius Calvaire, whom I had met on the 14th of July at the Consul-General's garden-party, thought it was time to intervene, and, waving his hand towards me, said:

"The Master may have every confidence; the gentleman is an artist. The G. O. C. French Mission chose him to take a cast of his feet."

O'Patah tossed back the sheets, rose, and threw round him a Japanese dressing-gown, on which storks were flying over embroidered chrysanthemums. (It always astonishes me to see elderly

people in this guise pass me in hotel corridors, for, in Japan, flowered kimonos are only worn by little girls and courtesans; sedate persons content themselves with sober coloured gowns, merely relieved by a monogram.)

"I love the French," said O'Patah, "because, like my own people, they have left their bones all over the world—particularly in the caves of Cork, when they came to save Ireland in 1798. And then, they have had great men, men who, when they blast, stagger the earth. Only Greece, Rome and France have such people in their history; tomorrow it will be America's turn, and that because of the Irish."

Then I, to infuriate him: "And the English?"

"*No,*" he returned in a temper, "the English always carry their England with them. In every part of the world it is never anything else than Albion. So they are doomed to be merely national celebrities, parochial heroes, the most dangerous thing in the world."

"But Ireland has provided England with heroes?"

"Understand that men who have given vent to witticisms and undisciplined gestures during their lives can never enter Westminster Abbey. . . .

Stop that electric fan; one can't hear oneself speak."

O'Patah was a man of sixty; the careful dyeing black of his hair aged him still more. He was like one of those Monsignori whom you see in their carriages in Rome, near the Quattro Fontane. Their hair is black; they have three blue chins, an impudent nose turned upwards, like one of Molière's lackeys, prominent ears, and eyes of crystal clearness. You would swear they were Latins, until you hear them speak English, and see them, after driving down the Via Sistina, enter a huge secretive-looking palazzo. Then you guess: it is an Irish prelate going to his college.

"Father Crumb," said he, addressing his ecclesiastical secretary, "give this young artist my biographical press note. He can read it while I am doing my exercises. It is a good thing for him to study his subject."

O'Patah told his negro servant to open a cupboard, in which I saw hanging a bag of sand. He drew off his kimono and stood up naked, his incredibly strong torso swollen with muscles, especially in his back, but drowned under a thick black coat of hair: then he had his hands bandaged, slipped on a pair of eight-ounce gloves, and started

punching his sack with right and left hooks of the most amazing violence.

I read:

> O'Patah, Jeremiah Patrick, man of letters, *b.* Inishkea, 13th May 1862; early education at Duncormac High School. First voyage to U.S.A. New York, at the age of 16; blacksmith, 1878; locomotive-bell-foundryman, 1882; resided Paris, Hotel de l'Odéon, 1890; crossed Balkans and Asia Minor on foot; pilgrimage to the Holy Land, 1893. Member of the Counradh na Gaedhilge, 1894; contributor to *Yellow Book, Harper's Magazine* and *La Revue Blanche.* War correspondent of *The Irishman,* Philippine War, 1896. *Treatise on Well-boring in Australia,* 1897. Banana merchant, Barbadoes. *Celtic Legends,* 1898. Violent pro-Boer. Edited *Irish Hooligan,* 1899. *Indulgences and Dreams,* 1902. Purchased estate at Buxton, 1903.

At this point as the telephone continued ringing O'Patah broke off his exercises, took the cord between his teeth and bit it in two.

> Defendant in libel action brought by South African diamond merchants, 1904. Sentenced to a term of hard labour for contempt of Court, 1904-6. Member of the Fabian Society. *Socialist Pleas,* 1907; *Poems to the Globe,* 1908; *The Song of Kilmainham,* 1909; *Essays in Agrarian Communism; The Druid's Future,* 1912; *The Raised Stones* (epic), 1913; *Ireland does her Duty,* 1916. Clubs: Reform, R.A.C. Member of the R.S.P.C.A.; Vegetarian. Recreations: Bicycling, chess,

salmon-fishing, boxing, haunted houses. Address: 18 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin; Antignone House, Drogheda. Medal of Honour (silver gilt), Buffalo Exhibition; Officer of the Arcadian Order.

"Does it surprise you to see me hitting so hard? When I was eighteen I was the best hammerman in the Baldwin Locomotive Works."

O'Patah seized me by the neck-tie and led me over to the light, fixing his knowing, treacherous grey eyes into mine. I felt his heart beating heavily, and he was in a muck of sweat, stinking like a docker.

"I am in love with a terrible angel," he told me; "since you want to model my head you should know what's going on in it. The bulk is not the same in a man in love and one out of love. Old or young, we're devilish plastic, according as things turn out. You must have noticed that? It is a countrywoman of yours. Her name is Ursule Cohen."

"From the sock mender!" shouted the floor valet through the glass door. He threw a parcel into the room, as newspapers are thrown out of moving trains.

O'Patah pushed the package under a piece of furniture with his foot, rolled the bill into a ball, and threw it on top of the mirrored wardrobe.

All round about him there was nervous tension, the atmosphere of preposterous genius, impetuosity and carelessness, veiled by an obvious southern grace, which cast a spell, whipping up the heavy, wet atmosphere of the Atlantic coast into a light, slightly acid cream: Irish humour. Every time that I had the opportunity of seeing O'Patah, I received the impression of some ballet given by an invisible monarch, wherein everyone who came near him took part. Great men weave round them an atmosphere of respect, emotion and adoration. Round this man everything quivered, began to dance, or to tell lies. It was a kind of operatic *petit lever,* like the *Rosenkavalier,* but it was that of a very great poet, probably after Claudel, the Chinese Ossian, the greatest living. No café, no salon, no continent could claim him for its own. We knew his verses by heart. His new poems were telegraphed all over the Empire at a pound a word, etc. They possessed a purity of form, something more than the mere perfection of a stylist, rather the natural expression of his native people, the purest in Europe possibly. This sad and concentrated genius of Ireland when she was no more than a lost cause, no more than a people made sterile by a gigantic past, O'Patah had rejuvenated, enriched with an

ancient craving for adventure. With bursts of laughter, with ecstasies, with inspiration, he reanimated all the conquests of modern poetry, those desolate Celtic landscapes, once echoing with groans.

In the end I put the same question to him which from the quay or even from the pilot's boat was, at that time, hurled through a megaphone at every notability who arrived from Europe.

"What about the war?"

"The war? I have just come from it; from slender England, even from the front. I was at Amiens and Boulogne, making speeches. The Germans ought to be beaten though, between you and me, I believe that the Allies ought not to obtain an outright victory. For the good of Ireland it should not be an easy peace. But don't repeat that, for the time is not yet ripe and I should not be understood. Meanwhile, I make speeches in the parks asking for more parcels to be sent to our Irish brothers who are prisoners in Germany; that is why I am here."

He did not allude to his Irish brothers who were in prison in England. Nor did he speak of the "great task of the redemption of the Irish nation," of "poor Erin," "the fatherland of the gintleman who pays the rint," and other conven-

tional sentimentalities which from force of habit the Irishman can rarely resist. I thought I knew all about his anti-English opinions and the part he had played in Easter Week, 1916. To hear him, therefore, preaching the word, confirmed the rumours which were going round New York that Dublin Castle was richly financing his activities. Or, as had happened to Parnell and many other revolutionaries advancing in years, had he perhaps acquired a taste for ordered politics? Possibly, too, he had renounced his regrets and his intention of avenging the "heroes of the Rising" because, after all, were they not writers and colleagues? In any case, I conceived the impression from that moment (an impression which grew stronger) that O'Patah's was a complicated personality, playing several parts, and with all its appearance of green old age curiously warped, developing in its own fashion beneath an external façade of dignity, kindness and love of justice. Far from being all of a piece, as he claimed to be, I found him by contact surprisingly dual; he possessed two looks, two talents, two voices; even two figures, one small, when he was crouched on the stool, the other almost gigantic, when he threw his head up and wore cork socks in his shoes. He had moreover two handwritings, ut-

terly dissimilar, a fact which had made him famous among handwriting experts.

When not in the limelight he lived amidst flowers and bills, like a tired diva, an elderly coquette, among parasites, adorers, journalists and tradesmen, a prey, despite his pose of renunciation and his calm exterior, to the violence of his own passions, a twentieth-century survival of an Elizabethan poet of adventure.

Every minute more and more letters were brought in; O'Patah impressed into opening them not only Father Crumb, but also his negro servant and myself. My share was the waste-paper basket, full of telegrams, which the bell-boys, sharp as smacks, kept pouring into the room. The electric fan blew up the hairs round the motionless tonsure of the priest; Crumb put down his pipe and said:

"I place in a class by themselves the presents which our Lord has sent us: kindly pass them over to me."

Between four and half-past O'Patah was offered the following gifts: a property in Alabama, a gold claim, one hundred and fourteen boxes of chocolates, panthers, a tame beaver which played baseball, a life insurance, a standing tobacco crop,

some praying mats, a racing stable, a faked Rembrandt.

O'Patah tore open his mail with his teeth and elbows, as he was still wearing his boxing-gloves.

"To think such things still amuse me after all this time. That is because I haven't always been on Fame's free list. My life, you see, has been illustrated by gestures which are not those of a gentleman, and my poetry by figures which are not those of a university graduate. That shows you exactly how far I am from society, from English society especially."

. . . . . .

Entered a man of the Orient, with a rose in his button-hole, followed by a bell-boy carrying a phonograph.

"Allow me to present my card."

We read:

O'PPENHEIM

The apostrophe had been added in ink. We all appreciated this compliment to Ireland. Mr. O'Ppenheim had lost an eye, the result, he told us, of the explosion of a bottle of champagne which he was manufacturing in a cupboard.

"Can you let me have the sole rights of repro-

ducing your to-morrow night's speech at Tammany Hall for the Junius Gramophone Company? Your price is ours," and he drew a cheque-book from his hip-pocket.

"Five thousand dollars," replied O'Patah promptly.

I heard the perforation tear. The cheque passed into the hands of Crumb.

"If the Master will be kind enough to come nearer," said Mr. O'Ppenheim, scratching a black beard that looked like hairs on the stomach, "we can have the first audition."

O'Patah made a megaphone of his hands.

"Perfect, stand just a little higher. It is better that the voice should fall perpendicularly on to the record. If it would not give you too much trouble, Maître, I would ask you to stand up on your bed."

O'Patah leapt on to the spring mattress and began:

"I was born in the isles of the West, in the open wastes of the Atlantic, where the Irish mother gives her earliest, warmest welcome to the winds of America. I was raised among the fishermen, beneath a moss roof, between walls made of bird-droppings. An eternal and unique snow, fields of fish-bones spread before our window.

During the cyclones, to appease their wrath, my father and the seal-killers who had made him king among them, carried their woollen idols to the tops of the cliffs.

"Neither consumption, Christianity, nor conscription have ever reached those few islands where men still worship the sun and the fountains. Above the wheeling sea-race whirl the sea-birds. And from the day I was weaned I was fed on oil of petrels, and on port. To you, my Irish brethren of America, I carry the memory of Inishkea, those islets to the north-west of Connaught, where the trees are bowed down and softened, caked and fossilised into turf that has bitter smoke. I am come to accept your hospitality, the hope of a better future, the certainty that you will share with us in the Allies' victory, springing from which a new justice shall rule over the world; and as sure as the sea-currents unite us to the warmer shores of America, to the Gulf of Mexico, in whose heat the Antilles hide like soldiers in winter-time between their horses' legs, so that same affection between two continents is sealed in my person. Often to our shores the sea brings tropic seeds, and in spite of the salt water they are still a meal for us. And lianas, too, and canoes riddled with worms and, once, a mahogany

bole, on which of yore coloured birds had perched. . . .

"We remain faithful, but free. Here where all the races mingle, the shape of Irish skulls remains Irish. In the days when we were hewers of wood and drawers of water, we taught ourselves a still harder profession, the game of politics. First in municipal politics, and thence to that wider sphere of action which is bounded only by the borders of the world. Ireland has always been international: French, Roman, American. A warrior race, we have given our blood to breed those conquering peoples who to-day lead the universe. We have given recruits to all armies, we have conquered in all countries . . . save in our own.

"Since you see me among you, here, in the Waldorf Astoria, on a new continent, bound to you (and far more closely bound than by the Cunarders) by those ties of the heart which unite the emigrants to their families, the skyscrapers to the turf cabins, let me sing for you in Gaelic, the poem which I wrote in *Celtic Songs,* in honour of Oilean Ur, which means America, the Isles of the Blessed, the mirage of poor Irishmen. . . ."

Little by little as the rumour that O'Patah was talking spread through the hotel, journalists

waiting in the Marie Antoinette drawing-room, guests shaving in their rooms before dinner, maids and Irish nurses, grey swans, leaving their young charges in Gerald Park, scullions, ironing maids, detectives, chiropodists, the man in charge of the cold storage for furs, all crowded into the corridor, and even to the bedside.

"When I am laid beneath a dark stone of sepulchre,
And my soul among the assiduous otters
Is born anew. . . ."

began O'Patah—

"Irishmen! You who bear burdens,
You who are tillers of earth,
Will you bear more lightly your liberty?
Will you harvest? O tell—
Will you harvest again and for ever
For others?
And you, the forefathers,
You who lie with your nets and your spears,
In the bird-droppings and shell-beds,
Shadowed by cypresses, kin to the cypress of Florence. . . ."

When he came to the lines:

"Sings she in winter too
The magpie of Erin. . . ."

everyone knelt down and took up in chorus, to the air of Cleverly's famous song:

> " Will you harvest? O tell—
> Will you harvest again and for ever
> For others? "

The Irish pass with no transition from sloth to pathos: poetry, with illicit whisky and gun-running, is their dearest pleasure, not forgetting " liberty," that expensive national dish. The hotel was seized with exaltation; the beat of voices made the steel joists tremble, the water rustled in the pipes, the spiral staircases swayed to and fro, the roof rocked; there were eruptions from young men in gold-rimmed spectacles, eighteen floors below us, right in the street, demonstrating with horns, klaxons and hooters, standing up in their Fords.

Although the day had fled, kicked out by the sky signs, O'Patah had to show himself on the balcony of the fire-escape; one could see the crowd down in Broadway, like lead shot; students were pouring out of the Metaphysical Institute in paper hats, shouting; and the cry of "God save Ireland!" came up to us faster than the elevators.

" Hark to Pat! Silence for old Mike! God save the big boss! "

Everyone was shaking hands.

As I leaned over the balcony behind O'Patah, thinking of that night after *Mérope,* which Grimm

describes in his letter on the apotheosis of Voltaire: "Torches, torches! that all the world may see him!" I felt against my back a warm, quivering body. I turned, and though I had never seen her before, I asked:

"You are Ursule?"

Her only reply was to fasten her body to mine and to run her tongue over my lips.

"That brings us closer than speeches," she said.

The engines on the Elevated hurled their thunderbolts. Five seconds later their roar was heard on Brooklyn Bridge.

. . . . . .

I shall not detail the full consequences this kiss had for me. It must be said that they were unusual. Liquid and lingering, like a bowl of warm milk, yet leaving one so intoxicated that one had much ado not to fall down. Next, nearly within reach of one's own hung a mouth without end as if slashed by an axe, and, at the edge of the lips, the smooth tongue of an affectionate animal. But behind this sort of smile, giving it the lie, the eyes of a panther about to spring, half closed, watching for the weakening of the tamer. I have never met anything so feline as Ursule. A charming nature, which awaited the moment when your

pleasure had turned to suffering, to take its own. Ursule lent to that poor word "pitiless," which has a soft, washed-out colour, an unknown vigour. What did she want? For some time I wandered (all this, by the way, is not a reconstruction after the event, made up from the scrapings of one's memory), round a sealed vase. At the beginning one prowls round, asking oneself "Which way in?" I used to look in her hands for the heart-line and then for my own presence in it. Where beneath her Marcel waves would one find the bump of destructiveness? But how gifted she was! It would be a great relief to set down here my tribute to this.

Her father had been a rag-and-bone merchant. Her childhood had been that of a young badger, living from one hole to another. She came from God knows where and was going God knows whither, in spite of the fact that she appeared to be perfectly aware of her own destiny. First in London, later in America, she had fled from the war, as from some heart-rending and annoying spectacle (there is no flag, even double width, which could be made into a dress). With complete indifference she let herself be exported and re-exported from one country, from one nation-

ality to another. Like precious wares, always certain of finding a market. Accepting every hospitality, but exempt from all duties, attaining at one bound to that position of organised anarchy, to that cosmopolitan exercise of sentiment which only limited companies and the greatest geniuses attain. In truth, I have never known any more about her—but why search? It was clear that nothing had ever laid its mark on her, that with her supple character and her ever-submissive eyes, she went where she pleased, departed when she wished giving herself complete absolution, never smirched, even by contact with the lowest; ignorant of defeat; showing an equal courage before the most respectful demands and their reverse; refracting all lights, having taken out no licence for that audacious secret traffic which brought her to us, always acute, indivisible, showing towards us a physical independence. In a phrase, perfectly noble, that is etymologically, paying no taxes.

I reckon the three months that followed among the worst in my life. Ursule surrendered at once, and then snatched herself back again so swiftly that I could scarcely believe I had ever possessed her. So completely that I neglected all those pre-

cautions which one takes to rid oneself of too persistent memories, and they failed me later when the desire for her returned; that most horrible of desires because it cloaks itself as the truth. She had no sooner left me than she began to flee from me as if she feared—and I felt honoured by it—contagion from some disease with which she really wanted me impregnated. One day, when she was asleep, I stole her vermilion lip-stick and wrote the word " Danger " in red capital letters on her breast. For all this, I took no further precautions. I tried to jest with her, called her " ravishing wolf, ravaging wolf," but it was of no avail. Every humiliation, lie, deception was practised on me (some might have said with premeditation; wrongly, for everything she did was completely spontaneous). She treated me to them in the most affectionate way; sometimes, when she had played me some evil trick during the evening, she would ring me up in the middle of the night to find out what I thought of it. It would have been possible to doubt her cruelty if she had not had the originality to follow up her tricks at once and to make sure of the result in person, what I used to call, observing the effects of the shell bursts.

" No one can say they yawn when they're with

me," she would declare, and invariably add "Bless you!"

Yes, I was blessed, terribly blessed. In vain I would trample under foot the flowers she gave me, carefully wash my feet and hands after leaving her; her smell remained within me. I recalled O'Patah's aphorism: "When she does me the honours of her body, I think of the floor of a scaffold: it says not a word of all the executions that have preceded my own."

The spectacle of O'Patah, another victim of Ursule, this rosy terror, came opportunely to distract me. He did not react to her as I did, but like a man of his age, with more restraint, more strength, and a more thorough knowledge of women. Nevertheless, he suffered as well as I, and perhaps she treated him still more harshly, since certain necessities, as I had heard tell, placed her in a closer state of dependence, which she could not forgive him. In spite of all this he would talk of the "freedom of the senses." "Mine is a primitive temperament, elementary," he would say, or "Like all my fellow-countrymen, I am remarkable for the violence of my reflex action," making demands on the credulity of his hearers, a failing which is not the least

of those on which the Irish so wrongly pride themselves.

. . . . . .

It was about five o'clock in the morning when, through the white door of the cabin, they called out " Kingstown," or as one has to say nowadays, Dunlaoghaire. The lighthouses glittered in full daylight, like electric light left on by a drunk man. On the bridge the cool wind filled one's empty head, and the smell of bacon gnawed at one's stomach. The sky was grey and ready to absorb anything, like blotting-paper. The boat spat warm water through the holes. I saw that we were already in the middle of the bay, a widely open jaw, terminated at the corners by rocks like canine teeth. From the depths of these jaws, as from dragons', came forth a cloud of black smoke: Dublin.

I had had a Marconigram from O'Patah a few days before. He had learned no doubt that the bust which I had made of him in New York had been favourably received in Paris, for he begged me to join him at Drogheda to discuss the plan of a monument to the dead. Was he projecting some municipal liberality? I looked back on the

year 1918-19, which will never be like any other, without seasons, climates, greenness or anniversaries; streaked with brutish happenings, sacrifices, twisted by the last offensives, rent by the Armistice, made hideous by the rhetoric of orators and a superfluity of bank-notes; crossed by a large number of personalities in tail-coats; heroes, statistics, trumpet-blowings, decorations; repentances and political systems; in short, so far removed from what the return of peace, which we had imagined so calm, so religious, should be, so much lovelier and even more dangerous did this new life appear than the lingering death which had preceded it.

We left the bay on our right, great stretches of uncovered mud, which, however, when the sun was reflected in it, assumed a brilliance which gave the illusion of water. Fishermen with their nets waded in this fish stock.

Little by little the war was abandoning a world seized by that false hunger which convalescents believe real (until their temperature rises again). But in Ireland, in the wake of the elections, it began once more, drowning itself in St. George's Channel, fired by the call of the air, between two seas; a real war at last: no apoplectic financiers or

pale diplomats, no terror of material damage, no nervousness of a public opinion in a hurry to have done with it, and no wiseacre strategists. And, moreover, not a war in the open fields, tiresome as a game, but a real citizens' war, raised to the dignity of an urban entertainment. I remembered the aphorism of a Parisian Communist in 1870: "The pleasant thing about civil war is that one knows whom one is killing."

It was now a year since I had met O'Patah. I had seen much of him up to the day of the Armistice, when I left the United States. He had gone from meetings to interviews, from demonstrations to banquets, drunk, never looking ahead, but absolutely certain by instinct of what he ought to do to please them over there, that is, to be at once religious and comic, a true son of those "Irish savages" of whom the earliest English chroniclers speak, of the bardic story-tellers, always patriotic and clamouring to the Americans while pointing to the Atlantic, the famous phrase which decided the vocation of St. Patrick: "A boat is prepared for you."

I had not seen him since his return to Ireland, where he had arrived at the beginning of 1919. All I knew was that after the elections, which

expressed the Irish point of view so clearly, he had taken up an attitude somewhat above the general strife, striving to play off the Loyalists against the Irregulars, the R.I.C. against the I.R.A. in order to avoid having his house burned; quite disgusted that he could no longer maintain the pose which he had adopted during the Great War (in return for which he had been entrusted with his propaganda mission), where he need do no more than sing of an ideal Ireland backing up England (*vide* the posters) in her fight for Justice and Democracy. What with the suspension of the Home Rule Bill, and the non-enforcement of conscription, everything had been so easy.

Thanks to the post-cards which he sent me from time to time, I learned that the declarations of Independence (save for the matter of style) had received his approbation, but that, on the other hand, he had refused to sit in the Dail Eireann. I used to answer his post-cards, not because I was proud of corresponding with so great a writer, but because I hoped to get news of Ursule. He never mentioned her.

On my arrival at Amiens Street at six o'clock in the morning, I found instead of porters Irish soldiers, who made me put my hands up. Dublin was deserted, peopled only by explosions.

Because of the early hour, and also because it was a public holiday, a real battle was in progress. The London papers as yet gave no news of it. The Seven Hundred Years' War had started again during the night. At the street corners soldiers in fighting order laid hands on me, stopped my jaunting-car, a carriageless horse, carrying the driver hung on its right flank and on its left myself, with my bag on my knees; three times was I searched to the lining. The great week of 1916 has remained dear to the hearts of Dubliners. In Sackville Street traces could still be seen, round the Nelson Column, on the hardly rebuilt Post Office, and on great roofless buildings, with windows gaping to a sky decked with those beautiful Irish clouds, superb maritime structures, all mother-of-pearl, striped with grey showers.

My room at the Clarence looked out on to the Four Courts, a slender Pantheon, and the quays of the Liffey, in whose waters shiver eighteenth-century houses, with the grey stone darkened to the colour of woodwork. Gulls were screaming, a cry as inarticulate as a political slogan. Resolved on sleep, I pressed balls of wax into my ears, which made the foolish clockwork of the machine-guns suddenly retire a long way. . . .

At last I heard the kicks against my door. I had slept till midday.

"Honey! I'm after being in town since yesterday," said O'Patah, coming into my room. "I am living at my house on St. Stephen's Green. You wouldn't have got to Drogheda, for they blew up the railway bridge this morning. But I can put you up in town, although my cook is at this moment in action commanding a battalion, and since yesterday my house has been giving cover to the Republicans, who have brought up their machine-guns. It's the same with nearly all the corner houses, for they take the streets in enfilade."

"The blood of the old warrior is roused."

"Three cheers for Irish liberty! Of course. Three cheers for all oppressed nationalities! The prolific countries who eat potatoes! Three cheers for whoever you like, as soon as there are blows to give and take!"

"You are a force of nature, Maître!"

"Yes and no. And yet, yes, for in reality everything is equally indifferent to me, as in nature. Besides, what is the good of going on living?"

He looked at me with his eyes screwed down to the smallest stop in order to obtain a clearer view of his thoughts, or of mine, angry eyes too, like the Colleone's as they might have been seen close

up in the room of the Palazzo Veneziano in Rome, where he took refuge in 1917.

"The Irish are beggars," said O'Patah, "who hate charity out of disgust at material comfort. Moreover (Synge has been too exclusive), we are *all* play-boys. Barricades in the streets; fences in the fields (which the English who go on foot in towns and hunt in the country will never permit). Our peasants are a little like yours, minus their taste for numismatics, but . . . no moderation, especially in drinking potheen or knocking their neighbour's head in. On the whole, more meridional than you. A penitentiary colony where one can get drunk is not so bad after all. People come to me from both camps saying, 'Take up your responsibilities.' And from whom am I to take them? Do they think that I play on words? One can also play on one's word. In reality I am horrified at seeing my morning paper confiscated, and having my taxes levied in the streets by terrorists. That is why I have refused the Ministry of Justice in the Provisional Government. A country's progress is not the work of its actors or writers. A poet's business is to belong to his country's mythology as soon as possible. Anything is better than amendment. Let us do our best to avoid, on the one hand, the halter of Kil-

mainham Gaol and, on the other, the Laureate's bays."

As a matter of fact, he had already taken pains to advertise his neutrality, for he wore on his Norfolk jacket a brassard, with a huge red cross; another on his hat, and two more on the lamps of his Ford. (He owned two Napiers, but used the Ford on days when there were requisitions or battles.)

Crunching the remains of the sugar from my breakfast tray, he ran on in this vein for a long time. True Irishman, victim of his own imagination, ready to write an epigram in his own blood, sometimes as indifferent as a tramp, sometimes as bitter as a dismissed Civil Servant. And all the time the humoristic eloquence of his race, which, used partly to mock at himself, forces him into an extreme confusion of ideas which he does not believe in, but of which, sentimentally, he is the first victim.

Before our eyes, a heavy shell threw down out of a church tower a parcel of snipers, like a bundle of asparagus.

"If this goes on," said O'Patah, "the domes will be doomed."

His mouth spread out to his prominent ears.

He was pleased to be able to tell me that there

had been seventeen deaths during the fighting in the early hours of the morning: pleased that there were no more; but, nevertheless, pleased that there had been seventeen.

" Those boys are not yet twenty, yet with the best will in the world they get themselves shot across this sweet Liffey, whose waters are scented with the roses and strawberries of Palmerston. . . . Ah! where are the happy days of Parliamentary obstruction and vows of Platonic nationalism. . . . What were the human sacrifices of the Druids compared to those of to-day?

" Mine, you know, is a pure intelligence. True, patriotism appears to me a magnificent thing, but also much the same as a quarrel between two villages. Steeples with cocks, cocks with denials. Exalting my people? I grant you, I've passed my life at that game! But, once again, patriotism is merely exasperated individualism. (You won't repeat this?) Through my nationalism alone, I have won an enormous reputation among the nations of the world—in other words, I am international. And a pretty trick *that* has played me. In looking too closely for my country, I have missed it. What's to be done? Nothing but to die in the odour of scepticism, and, as I hinted to you just now, seek sanctuary as quickly as possible

in Legend. This eternal extremism and miracle-mongering that Ireland lives in, sicken me in the end! Whatever the Gospel may say, the lukewarm are very pleasant."

Then feeling that he had gone a little far, he sighed hypocritically.

"My quixotry will be the death of me!"

"Did you invite me because you wanted to make an end of things?" I asked. "What kind of a mausoleum would you like?"

For the first time his face assumed a really tragic aspect.

"A mausoleum, yes . . . for myself too . . . later, a little later . . . I'll let you know. We'll talk about that some other day. I haven't the strength at the moment . . . my nerves. Heavy artillery is well enough in the country, but its shells weren't made for exploding in rooms. If this goes on all my tiles will come loose," said he, touching his forehead. "These race hatreds are terrible. I know that nothing would remain for a nation of poets and artists if it ceased to be accursed, but all the same. . . . You French, you die for forms of government without ever really worrying yourselves about essentials: you are as stupid as we are."

He opened the window and shouted into the street.

"Get to Hell out of this, I am immortal! I don't belong to any religious order, I have a big position in the world . . . in the world only. Down with the fairies! Look where they've led Ireland. Sentries! Lloyd George is as bad as St. Patrick!"

A volley of bullets made him lie flat.

In short, O'Patah was in a fair way to embrace O'Connell's dictum that no revolution is worth the shedding of one drop of human blood.

"Well, here we are at the top of the morning. Lunch-time," said he. "The battle will quieten down. Don't stay at the hotel. Come home with me. Put on your coat. I'll pay your bill."

. . . . . .

Overwhelmed by the noise, a school of rats crossed the river.

Houses blue, air blue. Residences of the ancient Irish nobility, with statues in niches. Through those windows which had not been blinded by mattresses, one caught a glimpse of Angelica Kauffmann ceilings. All the furies of gun-fire in the wider streets. Armoured cars

were returning at full speed from the fight splashing up the puddles, drenching the closed shutters and crumbling walls. Followed ambulances, presented by cinema companies, oil syndicates, makers of rubber heels; russet Irish terriers scurried behind them. A few trams crept shyly out. On the lawns equestrian statues of English kings lay overturned, wounding the sky with their stiff legs, like those one sees sticking out of the knacker's cart. Some business houses were entrenching themselves behind account books, between which loopholes had been left.

"Depression over Ireland, as the meteorological reports say," remarked O'Patah.

"Put your bag on top of your head," he added, "it is safer."

The Ford stopped before a handsome mansion, on the roof of which waved the green, white and yellow flag of the rebels. O'Patah contemplated the façade for a moment.

"On the whole, not much damage this morning. One six-inch shell over the porch but this Georgian freestone is divine material; the shell makes a hole but goes no farther. Besides, Dublin is a scepti-

cal, good-natured city, and to such nothing ever happens. Look at Paris."

O'Patah threw his hat on to a settee and started off walking very rapidly. I followed as well as I could. He opened one door, shouting, "Dining-room."

Then he dashed on. "Breakfast-room," and already he was at a distance. He might have been a man wanting to let his house in an hour, on whom some sentence of expulsion had just fallen.

"Drawing-room. My portrait by Orpen against a black background, done five years before he began painting English generals. Bedroom. My portrait by Yeats; over by the window, Lavery's picture. Although he has side-whiskers, what talent! Here, Macmanus's Isles of Inishkea. The white spot" (he marked the canvas with his pencil), "that is the third island, the one on which I was born."

Under his weight, the stairs groaned for mercy.

A door, followed by another door. A tiny staircase led up to the studio, which ran the whole length of the house; a kind of absurd boudoir. There were silver parrots' perches with marble bases, miniatures, a sofa with fur coverings in black and white lozenges, on which face down-

wards, lay two fifteen-year-old soldiers, who unrolled through the window a machine-gun belt, the empty cartridges leaping back across the room behind their heads and in all directions. O'Patah took not the slightest notice of them.

He seated himself on a couch upholstered in cherry velvet with gold braiding.

"That is Augustus John's portrait of me. It is painted in liqueur: I mean, it is phosphorescent, and yet free from heaviness; indubitably genuine, and moreover as sweet as an Angelus. I was writing my *Return of Dreams* at the time when that was painted, in 1914. You can see it on my features. You know my *Return of Dreams?* It is one of my best things. There I reach a power which could not be found elsewhere."

He took up a richly-bound copy on painted parchment, opened it and began:

> "Men, strong and watchful,
> Lying across the march of events,
> Ready to welcome the coming of angels. . . ."

Bullets whined as they passed over the roof of the house, or thudded flatly against the wall. A trench-mortar was firing in the garden.

"Not on the tennis-court," yelled O'Patah. He made a megaphone of his hands. "Not—on—the

—ten—nis-court. Is it yourselves that'll fill up those holes?"

"And as for you!" he cried suddenly furious, turning on the two young soldiers, sweeping the empty shells under the furniture with his foot. "You may as well tidy up and collect your filthy cartridges. I can't go on reading. I can't hear myself speak."

"Whose is that?" said I, suddenly stopping before an exquisite still life, in grey, rose and black, bearing the legend "Souvenir de Marie." It represented all that will some day remain of a woman: long gloves like stricken snakes, a dress emptied of its body, a hat with a dead bird, and in the background, in an oval mirror a bronze medallion, lost love. The picture, with its harmonies of soft, tender tones, evoked a melancholy that left one inconsolable.

"Nicholson's. It is called 'Souvenir de Marie,' but as you have guessed, it ought to be called 'Souvenir d'Ursule'."

I remained silent.

"You remember her?" he said, thrusting his eyes deep into mine.

I nodded. I questioned him as a friend, without beating about the bush.

"She is no longer with you?"

O'Patah's features, usually so mobile, hardened, his eyes flickered like manometers, with resisting the intolerable pressure from within. A fantastic storm shook his hands.

"She is not. Not since Crumb's death."

"Crumb then is dead?"

"The Virgin rest his soul! I picked him up when he came back from the front in 1916, invalided out. He was putting my manuscripts in order. He was on the spot, adventurous. . . ."

"Handsome," I added.

"No, not especially handsome," O'Patah continued, knitting his brow, "but above all so simple, so equable, so unartificial. He disinfected everything about him. As you saw, I had a father's love for him."

For a moment he became very red in the face, and struggled to express himself.

"'Grief has long legs,' as they say over here. No . . .," he went on, "without fear of making these old ghosts walk, I should like to tell you about him to-day. You know it was with difficulty that Ursule tolerated Crumb's presence near me. In fact, she hated him. Not that she loved me, but she believed that he isolated, distracted me. She wrote me anonymous letters, saying that he was robbing me, that he would throw me head-

long into the abyss; she called him the 'skinny odalisque,' prophesying that the affair would end in some terrible disgrace.

"And so it turned out. I don't know how she found out that Crumb was not a priest, but a deserter since 1915 from a Lancashire regiment. As soon as we returned to London at Christmas, she denounced him to the English authorities and, soon afterwards, in spite of all my efforts, Crumb got six years' penal servitude. The morning he was to be transferred to Aldershot, he was found hanging in his cell."

O'Patah drew from a lacquer box a packet enveloped in a sheet of lead.

"This is his heart," he said simply. "Death has bound us more strongly than life did. They say that we Irish are careless people, riotous, ungovernable: in fact, we are the victims of our passions."

O'Patah took from the table a tube of paper which he unrolled.

"I have drawn the plan for his tomb myself. Four feet by four. Crumb shall sleep upright, between walls of Galway granite, at the bottom of the garden, like our forefathers. You will have to make me something for posterity, my

French friend, without appearing to do anything, with that French grace of yours."

"And . . . Ursule?"

"I turned her out. Ireland is the one country in the world where there are no snakes. Penitence gave me strength. Ah, that woman! She made me climb every rung of Jacob's ladder, I believe. Capricious as a lottery-wheel. I feel as far divorced from her as Ireland from England since the Act of Union. I can no longer think of her without horror."

"But, once in a while, you think of her?"

"I do. I draw little pictures of her on the edges of manuscripts. I write letters to myself in which I speak of her. They say she was drugging me without my knowing it. I don't believe it, but the fact remains that I found in her presence a vitality, a faculty of reinvigoration, that since then has left me. I am sacrificed, sterile; I whirl in the void."

"Still, you are as famous as God, as Walter Scott?"

"That, of course, is not the point. Nothing can ever take from me the mighty idea I have of my own worth. Never has my reputation stood higher. But never have I been more unhappy."

"Well?"

"I am corrupted to the roots. I adore her."

Through the broken windows, on the lawn, I could see stacks of bicycles, behind which men in their Sunday clothes were beginning to dig trenches. Women, seated in a circle, as if shelling peas, were inserting the detonators in hand-grenades. Girls in bed-jackets, wearing old plumed velvet hats, with clay pipes in their mouths, carried them over in the laps of their skirts to helmeted Capuchins, who stacked them in a bandstand behind sand-bags.

In defiance of the battle, spring was loyally doing all that was expected of her. Climbing roses were shedding their leaves at each destruction.

"Listen to the cuckoo," remarked O'Patah, "one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . . . ten . . . . . fifteen. . . . Someone has still a long time to live. You, probably?"

. . . . . .

I saw O'Patah three months later in Venice. He was living in furnished rooms in a populous district, and went out but rarely, to play a game of billiards or to fight a few rounds with the sabre at the Accademia Caramella. The rest of his time he spent lying in bed writing his autobiog-

raphy. The laundry of the floor above him, hung on the telegraph wires, came down as far as his window, so that shirt-tails and legs of drawers concealed from him the town and the people, which, however, he had no desire to see.

Down in the depths of the bed, wearing an old blue sailor's jersey, he looked like a Gothic dragon, bored, because crushed by a bishop's feet. He smoked ceaselessly, and his fingers were stained as if with iodine.

"Already, beneath the flesh on my face," he said, "I can feel the death's head which I'm going to be."

I was disquieted to see him thus plunged in melancholy. I went up to see him every day, partly because I was sorry for him, partly because he told me such wonderful things. But, as soon as I tried to interest myself in him, he took offence, spat ink and disappeared like a squid. Often he would take up his pen as if I was not in the room. I waited for him to think aloud.

"All my life long, I've worked," he would say. "After I had heard Mass, I used to go to my poems as to a bank. I watched the world pass by with all its symbols, and I endorsed them. With no thought for the future, I drew upon them. I took what I wanted where I found it, out of the

mouths of heroes, out of flower catalogues, often from the works of others, as all the primitives have done, like those cave artists who covered over the drawings of the previous generation with their own. But my work, no one has ever plundered. Was it from honesty?

"Since I was thirty, you may say, I have reigned over words like a Caliph. Some I have executed, and have seized their goods; others I have made rich, with a stroke of the pen. . . .

"I am not a romantic poet. Yet I have never resisted temptation. Though, truly enough, I have been severe with myself at the same time. But I have no more belief in human dignity than it is necessary to have. . . .

"To-day, thanks to me, writers are able to do anything; to be savages, to be puerile.

"I recognise only one master virtue: Pride. Once broken it can never be mended. After God, it is for the working classes, and for charitable institutions, that I reserve my profoundest scorn."

Then he proclaimed out loud, "I dread a horrible death: it is the fault of my instinct for life; like women; like every creature that gives birth."

I did not dare admit to him what I thought of these confessions and aphorisms of his; besides, he never asked me my opinion. Now they lie in two sealed volumes in Dublin. It is certainly not this part of his work that I like best. But he was obviously holding himself up by his writing. Ceaselessly, with the idea of posterity in his head, he produced these impersonal edicts. He covered long pages of Italian Colombier paper with the tiny handwriting of a scholar, without erasures, and dropped them all around his bed, on to the pink and white sausage tiles. From the moment he ceased stringing words together, he gloomed. He was undoubtedly aware of it himself.

"Grant me, O God," he said, "that I may never find rest!"

In short, something in his innermost being had had enough of living. But something else, on the other hand, was obstinately contesting the matter.

He never spoke to me of those who aforetime, or even recently, had surrounded him. I can definitely say that he had an aversion for them.

"Impossible to see new faces, and old ones even less. You are an exception. There is calmness about you. And then, you are the first

Frenchman I ever came across who did not say to me, 'You English'."

Often he was seized with complete prostration, complained of insomnia. Curiously, he stated that the thing which made him suffer most acutely was his incapacity to feel pain. He took precise notes of the effect of this general debility.

"I can no longer feel things as before. I am getting further and further from myself. I seem to be no longer able to touch things: someone else touches them for me."

During the day he found Venice too horrible, with its ugly light, as vulgar as that of Algiers. "These smells of rotten eggs, these floods everyhere. . . ."

Why, then, did he live there?

The velvety mystery of night sometimes brought him peace.

At last, he would say, he was not followed by that shadow wearing black for him.

We would go down into the narrow streets, avoiding the cafés on the Procuratie, the Piazza San Marco, the hotel quarter, for he was afraid of being recognised.

Two detectives followed us at a distance, one belonging to the Communist, the other to the

Fascist party, attached to this celebrated individual, who lived in this strange fashion.

Rarely did his conversation show the brilliance I had once known. With his overcoat thrown over his shoulder, his hands in his pockets, his nose puckered up, a huge omega in his forehead, O'Patah talked to me tirelessly of the state of his fortunes, unexpected in a man who had lived both in luxury and misery, and had scoffed at them both. On certain days his conscience attacked him, and, ceaselessly, he would grub down into his past to find therein the slightest peccadilloes, which he forced himself, by minute argumentation, to present as unjustifiable.

One night, as we were wandering down by the station:

"I have never related to you an adventure that hapened to me here a few years ago? I was living in the cloister of San Gregorio, near the Salute. They used to rent you tolerably comfortable rooms. There every morning I found flowers lying at my door; yes, even in my boots. One day someone began signalling to me from the hotel across the canal. It was the prettiest girl in Vancouver. (I knew the place well, I stayed several months there.) Scarcely fifteen. She was in love with me. She recited three hundred of my

lines without taking breath. She would not go home, but came and sat there on the church steps, until I led her away and promised to live with her.

"How can I make you understand the strange, sweet impression this made on me? I showed her my hair, already white even at that time. I leaned my forehead towards her: and pure and resolute she kissed my temples. I fled. She followed me at a distance, and threw after me a look so sad that I turned back.

"'I shall never forget you,' she said.

"I was moved. All the highest in me was drawn towards this creature." (O'Patah was fond of the word "creature" and uttered it emphatically.) "She came to me neither lightly nor distrustfully, believing in my genius. The idea of tasting this delicious fruit never entered my head for a moment; nor to this day do I regret it. Still, see what a trick destiny played me. . . .

"'Love someone of your own age,' I used to repeat.

"Women, especially very young women, have such a curious habit of attaching themselves to what is successful, never to what will be successful.

"Well, I succeeded in disarming her. She ended by obeying me. The impetuosity she had

put into loving me did not cease to astonish even herself. 'You made me cry a lot.'

"Now she laughed. And she was cured. We were friends. I, the old man, and this unspoiled girl would ride on horseback together, along the shore as far as Malamocco.

"My sixty winters warmed themselves in the Adriatic waves. Delicious consolations! Rosa showed me all the attentions a child should show her father.

"I made the acquaintance of her parents; her father was a timber merchant from British Columbia. They soon treated me as one of the family. I took all my meals with them at the hotel.

"Rosa had a younger sister. . . . (Now listen carefully, my friend, and tell me if one can really be held responsible for such vagaries.) Within two days, without any hesitation, this little sister . . . she was thirteen . . ."

. . . . . .

It was not unusual for memories of this kind to fall from O'Patah's lips. He called them up with no pleasure, possibly by way of repentance. He used them to show his low opinion of genera-

tions in which such things were possible, to throw the blame on the whole of our own epoch.

Soon he got up no more, but remained in bed, his face to the wall, with no desire of anything at all left in him, too weak to stretch a hand out towards the table. He refused food, excusing himself on the grounds that everything tasted of human flesh. He gave up getting drunk.

I used to read to him. The books he liked best were *De Rerum Natura* and *Twenty Years After*.

Evening fell on the shirts, dry by this hour, bellying in the breeze. The street was beflagged in honour of cleanliness. I was looking at the narrow shape of the sky between the houses, framed by leafy smoke-clouds, growing out of those Venetian chimneys that resemble flower-pots. The sun struck a window opposite and, disconcerted by the first shock, rebounded across to knock against the iron bedstead of the poet.

I should much have preferred to watch the bead-stringers passing in the street below but O'Patah was listening, agreeing by nods of the head as I read:

"'Monsieur de Chatillon," said Aramis, drawing from his holster a second pistol which he had kept against this opportunity. 'I think that, if your pistol is unloaded . . .'"

"You are a dead man!" finished O'Patah.

. . . . . .

It was a honeyed morning. The heat penetrated by a fresh wind that set off women's dresses. Cocks were crowing. No one was nagging. One could hear pruning-knives trimming the orange-trees in the garden. Far away, the barks of the klaxon: motor-chars-à-bancs going off to spend the day on the French Riviera. A few incomplete phrases from the Carabinieri orchestra in the bandstand, and it was eleven o'clock. Poor notes besides all those uncreated melodies lingering unformed, in the indubitable azure. One could see shining the cupolas of the Orthodox church, the slates of the Wesleyan clock tower, the corrugated iron of the Presbyterian chapel; and then, facing the sea and the sun, the old quarter with its ochre-coloured hotels, and the new quarter with its white ones.

The desolation of this Italian Riviera. On the French coast, in the absence of the lovely hibernants of yesteryear, the flowers, at least, spread

their propaganda, but here there was nothing left, save the memory, of Russian luxury, of German voluptuousness, which lay shattered in the bottomless pits of the exchanges. Spectres, these signboards. Everything for sale. VILLA DA VENDERE (CON TERRENI). Only a few families of Swiss business men were trying not to die. Ruined hotels, ships without freights, had been sold by floors, cut up by cabins; and this Casino, where the spangled dresses could be seen through the holes in the municipal plaster.

At Nice I had just learned that O'Patah had had a stroke near Portofino-Kulm, on the Genoese coast, where he had a house. At first I was surprised. He was so vigorous. Then I remembered several warnings which, even from the days in America, had disturbed me; a plethora of puns, ill-considered purchases, obsessions, exaggerated hand-shakes, indiscretions; since my Dublin visit, those bizarre monologues, in language more and more bombastic and pretentious. Finally, last autumn at Venice, that melancholy dissolution. . . .

The newspapers had given up publishing the bulletins of his health, because his illness was lasting too long.

I went up to the Lodola, a chalk-white villa which hit one in the eye; the footpath slipped down as one toiled to climb up it. A paved terrace cast a rosy shadow on to the walls, into which the black holes of rooms greedily burrowed their way, cool and bridal behind their mosquito nets. The tapestry on the chairs in the salon told the story of a hunt. I seated myself on the mort o' the deer. Seconds drip-dropped like water. A portière of bamboo and glass beads, in which, when drawn to, bloomed pictures of climbing roses; one of them opened suddenly.

It was impossible not to recognise O'Patah. But he was transformed into a moulting goat: there was no colour left in his cheeks, and he had let the hair grow under his chin. And he bleated, the paralysis of one side having cleft in two his mouth and his speech. His hair and his shoes were white. His moral stability had diminished and his twitching, obviously due to automatism. He pitied himself.

"The storm has passed. Ruin in the forest. And what is more horrible than to be present at the failure of doctors and medicines. I am getting weaker, my dear fellow. . . . And here, it's as melancholy as a cabin at home when the pig dies.

A little champagne in the morning is an excellent tonic."

He had some brought him in a canvas fire-bucket, which he hung on the window-fastening.

I quoted some of his own verses, an attention he liked:

> "The oak whose shadow lies across the forest
> Sees o'er his own a longer shadow fall."

His face darkened.

"Is that an allusion to my health? Who told you that? It is nothing more than a touch of rheumatism. Excellent arterial tension. Thirteen-eighteen by Pachon. Besides, I am here as a tourist. . . . (H'sh) honeymoon. You can guess who is living upstairs, can't you? Ursule, of course. I had already forgotten her. But she could not go on without . . ."

Disease had altered him greatly. His moods of violence, of triumph, of silence were no longer the same. He frightened me with his face, the colour of train-pillows when they are thrown out on the platforms at the terminus. A palm-tree came in through the open window with its plaited trunk, hairy as a chimpanzee, from which hung its natural fruit, a thermometer. The barred shadow of the palm-leaves painted great fish-bone

patterns on O'Patah's forehead, and over his stained suit of cream cashmere.

He led me into his study. The invariable flowers from anonymous admirers, telegrams, letters from fanatics, recognisable by their capital letters, petitions from nurserymen asking leave to name their roses after him.

" They have had to double the post-office staff since I arrived."

I was ill at ease in this long room, ornamented by sealskins nailed to the wall by their flippers, busts of heroes of the Irish Revolution, bewhiskered Druids, commemorative medals, green enamel palms under glass cases, and photographs, with a thousand shirt-fronts, of banquets given in his honour by the Overseas Dominions.

A preening landscape profited by the whole length of the open veranda. Clouds hung on the mountain sides, abandoning the sea and the shore to the sun. As the cliff drew near to this heat it melted away like an ice in a shop-window, in spite of the efforts of the cypresses, disjointed cactuses, and the turnings of road, to hold it together.

O'Patah pointed to the hill-sides.

" Because of my asthma " (was is really that?), " I can scarcely go up there any more, to bid good-day to those charming little girls with hair done

into two plaits falling over either shoulder . . . a sweet thing, a little girl . . . who grow carnations among these white ruins, the only ones that the earthquakes have left standing upright. Apart from that, I assure you that I am in excellent health. I am a child; but don't let anyone put trust in that. In my country you will meet very gentle people who mourn the day when the flowers and the fairies talked together, but who'll draw their hundred pounds for the murder of a policeman. I refuse to be regarded as a retired admiral. I shall still astonish the world."

I threw my eyes over the desk at which he wrote standing upright, the floor strewn with goose-quills and leaves of alfa paper. He sat down rubbing his thigh, full of holes from caffeine injections.

"Full blast. *The Quest of Oranmore.* Poetic cycle in six cantos. You may look for yourself: not one erasure. Is that the privilege of a senile mind? Look at my manuscripts. I am writing three different versions, according to the public I am addressing: one for Dublin, another for New York, a third for Paris. Further, a fat royalty for the film rights. I am like . . . you know . . . that fabulous bird which is born again from its own ashes."

"The phœnix."

"That's right. My autograph went up two dollars the day the *Chicago Express* prematurely announced my death."

Throughout his life he had followed the London autograph market, where every big man has his price, is worried when it falls, pleased when it booms.

"Did I tell you that recently a lady in needy circumstances wrote to me, asking permission to publish some love-letters she had once received from me? How could I refuse? Fifty editions!"

He was like an imitation of himself. This exaltation was no longer the vigorous physical imperialism which formerly took possession of everything in his path; it was a kind of monstrous internal swelling, rooted in feebleness, which was painful to see. At Venice, depressed though he was, he frightened me less. (It was not until much later that I learned that these sudden strokes, these organic disorders, were only the regular advance of a pitiless disease.)

"I am going to read you a little thing, not at all bad, which I've been writing this morning. Just as it came. I never read a thing over again."

He pushed me against the wall, a manuscript in his hand:

"Orient, ancient of years, wilt thou deny the original
Orgulous pride of those whose strength is o'erclouded,
Otiose hands oscillate
Over their instruments, only
Obedient for odious objects
Optional opulence, outbreak obscured,
Overcast obsequies."

"You notice the 'o's.' Through six cantos every verse begins and ends with words in o. A really extra-O-rdinary feat of skill."

Then addressing himself: "O'Patah! when will they come back, those days of the horses taken out of my carriage, the evenings of triumph, the Tivoli choruses, and all those farmers who surrounded me the first day I spoke on the South Mall? The blazing tar-barrels. . . ."

After that, I realised that he was in a very bad way.

He drew me into the garden, spared me neither the rose-walk, nor the model tank with double fountains, nor (this was his greatest pride) his name in huge letters traced in red pebbles on the sloping lawn. In the garage I saw the Napier. I learned that Ursule had her landaulet; that when they moved house, the wardrobe-trunks were towed behind. I was told of his speculations in

the Finnish mark, and the disillusions which the dinar had had in store for him.

"You are here for long?" asked O'Patah. "Forty-eight hours only? Then you will not see Ursule. She is in France with relations. I'm glad of this little holiday. She has become impossible to live with. She hung round me for hours looking at herself in the glass. I prefer women who reflect to those who reflect themselves. You know how she came back to me? I had heard nothing of her since her flight after Crumb's death. A day came when I could stand it no longer. Each morning I put an advertisement in the agony columns of *The Times,* between the people offering blue cats for sale and those seeking employment as confidential secretaries. No answer. At last I had an idea. I inserted: 'Ursule, sole legatee.' Three days later I read in *The Times:* 'Ultimatum accepted.'

"I knew her well, you see. Despite her gipsy airs, she is *bourgeoise.* Very material. (You remember her handwriting? Those thick downstrokes, those heavy full-stops, those club-like crossings of the t's.) A fireproof heart. Promises like those for making the hair grow again. She possesses pride, disorderliness and a dog's character, so people think her independent. . . ."

Suddenly he broke off, and looked at me with distrust. He began to whittle away the critical study he was making of Ursule. She had acquired a sound education, a taste for books, ironed her own underclothing, her health was delicate, she wrote up her diary every day in violet ink, and on some days in the month in red ink. Invincible at games of patience (and she would certainly need to be, with an opponent like him). A perfect way with invalids, a taste for instrumental music, with no idea except doing penance with her friends, and crucifying herself for tradesmen. . . .

He called her up so vividly that she appeared.

Ursule! how superb she was! An enormous sulphur-yellow hat and that complexion beneath it! I was so stirred by that moment that I recall everything that she never was. She laughed with that same mouth. . . . Sometimes when the work-rooms are emptying you may see mouths like that. How magnificent Ursule was! So completely self-sufficient. Other women always look as if they were a bit of someone else.

I noticed a serious failing of memory in O'Patah; for he appeared to have forgotten

that he had tried to conceal Ursule's presence from me, and did not explain why he had done so. I was shivering, chilled, burning to utter to this lovely being all those cruel phrases that rise to the lips when one is happy.

She perceived all this hostility.

"How nice you smell!" she said.

I shall never forget that minute. We all three stood in that shadowy study, in which there floated to and fro our sins, our desires, our literary ambitions, a pathetic overhead sun that varnished the palm-leaves, the first feelings of hunger. Above all, in O'Patah's case, a dissolution of personality so rapid that we were intoxicated by it. General paralysis fluttered in through the window, like a blue butterfly. This disintegration so close to us excited both Ursule and myself. At last we felt the power to make great demands on each other; the warning that O'Patah must soon meet the debts he had contracted for his wonderful life, would in no way bind us to economies.

"Don't go on looking as if you'd been skinned alive. I'll pick you up at the Casino this evening, after I've put the 'dominie' to bed. It's delightful to see you again."

She lied, with that mouth which positively aided and abetted her in everything.

I slept the whole day, overcome by the champagne of the morning, and by a wind which made the tips of the cypresses touch the ground, tortured the nerves, made the sand grit between the teeth, dried up the mucus. Limply I lay on my bed, counting the flies and the spots of blood left on the ceiling by crushed mosquitoes, while I mused on O'Patah. By his age, his passions, his refusal to compromise, he was a man of yesterday. By his life of adventure, his lack of taste, his way of understanding everything, his incapacity to foresee things, his carelessness—laughing at space and having no fear of time—he was a man of to-day. A wilful vigour. Firm muscles and torn soul. Poet and Irishman, doubly dedicated to ridicule, ill-fortune and the sublime. Nevertheless, "worth his international," as sportsmen say, and infinitely prepared to take his place in history, whether he was asked or not.

. . . . . .

The table in the Casino lay, like a patch of rotten grass, in the middle of a kind of ferro-concrete garage. Far away, down the length of the mirrors, bloomed the American bar: cascades of moneyless punters. A footman in plush breeches was nailing up the heel of his shoe with an empty bottle. When a counter fell, a little bell

tinkled, and he went under the table with a dark lantern in his hand; but someone had always forestalled him.

As Ursule had promised to come, I did not expect her. How often had she inflamed me with those earlier promises! But now I had learned to walk the red-hot ploughshares barefoot.

She came in. I drew her out on to the balcony, tearing her dress—which appeared to fill her with delight.

Day fell, stone dead.

One lamp took fire, then all the bay. In front of the Kursaal young noblemen waited passively in Fiats for hire. The sea and the sky had crumbled away on the left, in a hole. The palm-trees, like aged pine-apples watched the stream of people sauntering up and down. Misery and a mandoline. The concierges from the great hotels, feeling the international situation escaping them, were holding a meeting; the tails of their frock-coats flapped at the sea. Last to leave were the seedy swallows, who, like the servants, come for the season.

"Tell me, Ursule, will you really be mine for once? Give yourself up, so that I may have some peace? Or do you mean to begin that headlong

flight all over again, like the first day I caught you?"

"Really! For once? What a desire for peaceful possession all you men have! A woman only belongs to you when she does the cooking. Take what is given you."

"As in New York?"

"New York has a value, owing to its natural wealth and its excellent geographical position. . . ."

"Especially when there's war in Europe."

"I never had any infatuation for the war."

"Nor for anything else that seemed to last."

"Don't wear everything threadbare, as the French do. You and O'Patah, I could love you both if . . . It really is terrible that in love the will counts for nothing. But there it is."

"Do you remember, Ursule . . . the day you sent me a note saying, 'You may have all my evil thoughts, they are intended for you'?"

"Poor child, always duped by a petticoat."

I answered her grossly. I told her that since the war our positions had been reversed, and that men had now become precious goods, for which women must fight. Though she still had a trick or two up her sleeve, she was really nothing better than a superannuated mistress. Feeling that I

was blundering, I insulted her. I called her "tender heart."

Enormous, sidelong, her eye watched me, like the eyes one sees painted on the Adriatic sails.

"Do go on," she said. "You don't frighten me. I love quarrels. When I was a kid, I used to get out of bed at night to listen to my father and mother fighting. Once I had the luck to follow a man in the street who was shouting unspeakable abuse after a woman. Bless y——"

Resolutely and gaily, I broke in with great familiarity.

"Is it a fact that you had Crumb arrested? One might almost say that you had a sense of comedy. And our old friend, the 'dominie,' as you call him? Is his number up? You'll give him a funeral with bands? There will be speechifying out in the sun, and dust all over our shoes. And *The Times* advertisements? *'Ultimatum accepted.'* A good joke!"

To make up for its lack of heart, her bosom possessed an extreme sensitiveness.

A smell of iodoform still clung to the walls, although the Casino had harboured no Italianate sick for several months. Play languished. On sofas along the walls, where the records of play were pasted up, the punters waited for inspira-

tion, or took the opportunity to explain at great length their want of luck, like authors in their prefaces. Suddenly above the heads and the damp swish of cards an iron voice:

"Banco!"

There were eight thousand lire in the bank.

O'Patah came in, clad in a dinner-jacket and a night-dress. He advanced, bowed to the green cloth and called, "Hail, flag of green Erin!" took his hand and threw down two without having asked for cards.

"Pay? Oh, but of course!"

And he drew from his pocket a handful of little pebbles.

Once more I can see that blue and rose room, and the moon shining in the hand-mirror. A palm-tree waves to and fro outside with a noise of *ciré* satin. Nail polish. Perfume. Manuscripts and dividend-warrants tied together with ribbons from a bust-bodice. Everything was passing into eternity by way of the dressing-room. One thought the night had lasted for years. I walked on tip-toe and crushed glass beads from the fringes of Ursule's dress. Nothing had moved since we

had brought O'Patah home, just as he had been picked up in the *salle de jeu*. He had tumbled into this feminine bed, with its trimmings of pink ribbons and open-work sheets. His face, like a mummy's, had only retained the outline of the features, the strong jaws (he used to eat cutlets with their bones, melons with their seeds, fish with their backbones) stamped with an extraordinary imprint of strength and malignity; thoughtlessness and self-love.

On a crucifix, as in despair, Christ raised His arms towards the sky.

"I shall be as yellow as a guinea again tomorrow," said Ursule.

DUBLIN—VIROFLAY, 1922

THE NIGHT IN CHARLOTTENBURG

THE NIGHT IN CHARLOTTENBURG

THE patent-leather boot squeaked.

"Egon von Strachwitz? I am he. I didn't expect you until to-morrow morning. You are very welcome. I will go and get a bed ready for you; get it ready for you myself, for I have no servant. My nurse goes to bed at seven o'clock. Unless you have no objection to sleeping on the sofa in the drawing-room."

The little room was in green and violet, with a lamp of enamelled glass hanging from the ceiling. Panther skins. Book-shelves up to half the height of the walls, curtained in a reddish-violet silk.

A morning-coat, a baroque pearl pin, the ears of an orang-outang, a skull as if rubbed with emery-paper, and my bag in his hand, he stood still in the centre of the carpet like a hotel porter.

"To-morrow you shall have your room over the Charlottenburgstrasse, decent, comfortable even, if you tip the housekeeper. Nowadays one has to tip everywhere, the police, society women,

kings, the Pope. (At another time, if it interests you, I can explain the whole history of the Church to you by her need of money.) To adopt the Homeric image of your street loafers, the Holy See has always been cut as short as stubble. It would be shameful if we were still dealing with the good solid money of the old days, with which one could buy pleasure and consideration. But the jolly thing is that money no longer has any real value; it is the sign of a sign, which at last ends by signifying nothing. No more illuminated fountains with their charming curves, no more radium treatments, no more caviare, tziganes, music-parties on the water, no more orchestras, no more asparagus in February. Once upon a time—you recall?—we went to the bank, and lo! a new world opened. Nowadays, the transmutation no longer works. On the borders of Azerbaijan I learned this saying: 'Tell me, rose-seller, why do you sell your flowers?' 'To get me money.' 'But with money, what can you buy more precious than roses?' (Admit that it frightens you a little to hear a Boche talking about roses?)"

He winked his eyes very rapidly, as if to transmit a Morse message with his eyelids.

"All this to explain to you that one needs a

parable to describe this vicious circle. To-day: 'Tell me, Banker, why do you sell money?' 'To get me more money.' 'But with money, what can you buy that is less depreciated than money, since beautiful things have no longer more than a market value?' People go on killing themselves for money, from sheer force of habit, without understanding that what they have between their fingers is nothing more than a little ash. It is devilish, but there you are."

He put down my bag, and seated himself upon it.

"I am a poor man, in spite of your 20,000 marks rent. I should not have put that advertisement in the *Lokalanzeiger* if I had not been poor. I should have engaged a French reader. I should have paid you. I should have treated myself to a Frenchman. But there, a starveling monthly allowance from my mother, the Dowager Baroness; one or two sales of collectors' pieces; that is all. Not a halfpenny out of this government of brigands since demobilisation. The 11th of November caught me at Van, on the staff, head of the Intelligence branch for the Armenian sector. When I got back into civil life, I had not so much as 10,000 marks in the bank. I called upon Ratibor: after the journey to England had been

paid for, I had practically no capital left. Ratibor—I don't mean the Prince, who, besides, is my mother's great-uncle—but a matrimonial agency, through which one sells one's title. (It is sometimes confusing for a foreigner when Jews take the name of the principality in which they are permitted to reside.) Thanks to this Ratibor (Ezra), people of birth marry a middle-aged demi-mondaine, remarry in London, come back to get divorced in Germany, and let the lady wear the title to impress the watering-places. To-day the business has ceased to be profitable. A baron's title is only worth 150 marks, and counts are turned away. For several days I walked up and down the streets with a sandwich-board:

MAN TO LET OR FOR SALE

but I never found a purchaser. Bearing a great name in the depths of misery is no joke, especially for us Germans who used to believe in progress. The aristocracy of the Empire stood for solid comfort, just as yours did under the Monarchy of July. And as we shall always lack that gracefulness in the lowest depths which makes the Russians inimitable. . . .

"You're dropping with sleep. I'm boring you.

Besides, I didn't bring you here to talk about myself. . . . Your hands are burning—hands far too white. Your fingers are spatulate: that is a bad sign. . . . Good night."

. . . . . .

I undressed. I turned out the light. The room was hot with a disagreeable, artificial warmth, in the depths of which I was rapidly forced asleep. Beyond the curtains of violet taffeta an arc-lamp, of the same material, winked at the edge of the balcony.

. . . . . .

I opened my eyes. Two o'clock had just struck. It was these two strokes, still vibrating, which I first met on the surface of my consciousness. I became aware of faint noises round me, isolated at first, but blending later into a muted drone. I turned on the light; the room appeared in all its ordered negligence. As soon as I plunged myself again into darkness there was a continuous sliding, like fingers passed along glass, a circular restlessness. There was someone all round me. My heart fell into the pit, and sleep was out of the question. I turned on the light again, making up my mind to take a book and wait for daylight. Having got up, I went over to the bookcase and pulled back the curtains. Instead of shelves I

found glass cases. The glass was doubled with metal grids. I tried to make out what were the objects behind the glass . . . they looked like ribbons, or ropes . . . they moved. . . .

Snakes!

Wakened by the light, they darted their lidless eyes at me, pressing their forked tongues against the glass. It was the vipers which had awakened me with their movement. Adders with white collars twisted themselves into rings. Other reptiles, dull grey with dark spots, rolled themselves into inextricable knots like paste in a candy-machine.

A hot-water installation ran round the room and across the glass. I drew back other curtains; beneath wool coverlets, enlaced and conjugal, some pythons were lying asleep, motionless, barred with wide yellow stripes.

I never felt any terror of reptiles. I shrugged my shoulders and went to bed again.

At seven o'clock in the morning my host came in. He was wearing a Turkish robe, and had put on an enormous pair of spectacles, edged with rubber, like tyres. In the depths of the glasses

swam a kindly, moony look. Strachwitz held some eggs in his hand, and a cardboard box beneath his arm.

"I trust that I did not wake you when I came home at dawn? As I do not ask you to pay your board in advance, I was bound to go out and gamble, so as to make sure of our creature comfort. I am harassed. Imagine, at midnight the club had settled down in Moabit; but scarcely was it my turn to deal than we had to decamp, for the anti-gaming police came in over the roof; it was not until two o'clock that the game started again near the Zoological Gardens in an unfurnished flat, for which the owner pocketed a whole year's rent in one night. The banker began to get into difficulties—and we to punt heavily—when we had to strike camp again. Five times this happened. One can get no peace except in the cellars of the Embassies, but that of course is very expensive. . . . But you, have you slept well, young gentleman? Slept that

'innocent Sleep
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,'

as Shakespeare says in those immortal Sonnets which are the *Internationale* of the bitter proletariat of pederasts?"

"It is in *Macbeth*," I answered. "I see no objection to your breeding reptiles, sir. But was it to provoke me, or to prove my mettle, that you installed me for the night in this room without warning me? As a matter of fact, it has amused me. I never lose my nerve under shock. Like women, I only dread the things I wait for."

He apologised. He had been taken unawares. But my room would be ready. He found himself obliged to disturb my sleep in order to feed his family. These ones here, spotted with black, whose name he had forgotten, but which came from Madagascar, sucked eggs in the morning. The cobra, with his hood spread, took his bowl of milk without the cream.

"Look," he said, opening his perforated box, which was full of frogs, "here is the meal of this restless animal with well-marked rings, the asp of the Pyramids: Cleopatra's, sir."

I pointed to the pythons with their roof-tile scales.

"It is their laying time. Very quiet. One rabbit every six weeks. But for them, above all, the prey must be a living one . . . or else one must stir up the corpse with a stick to deceive them. Death takes away their appetite."

"It is no sillier than a collection of postage-stamps."

He was disappointed at my indifference, but took care not to show it.

"My series are very incomplete. There are 1600 species of snakes. Among others I covet the grass-green horned adder, the seducer of frogs, but the rate of exchange. . . ."

He opened a glass case.

"Would you like to see one of these mysterious beings at close quarters? To touch one of these pathetic and accursed brethren?"

This remark was accompanied by an anxious glance, under which I strove to retain my limpid unconsciousness. Obviously, in his eyes, I was a field for experiment. This country is full of amateurs determined to live not only their own life, but yours also. One must resign oneself to this, when one lives in Germany. People at once pin you to a cork, turn you over in every direction, and take notes. The Germans have information-mania and a thirst for analysis. But their information is so falsified by excess of detail, their conclusions so disconcerting, despite the certainty of their methods, their neurosis so intense and, the further they burrow up towards the light, their blindness so crass, that they come into the presence

of the primary truths in no state to understand them. This man at least proceeded indirectly. Moreover, I had undertaken to hold daily conversation with him in French in return for his hospitality. Its subject mattered little. He was not a spectacled don who makes a painful ascent of you in nailed shoes, bearing his learning on his back, but a German of a less common type, anæmic, enlightened, gone astray, but a gentleman. The brutalising, nationalistic and tonic effects which the war had produced on me (though I look back on myself on the 2nd August 1914, in the Fort de Rosny, reading the *Wahlverwandschaften*) had turned him into a dilettante, made supple by his own proteanism and his varied experiences. The East especially seemed to have left on my host the mark of its seductiveness, refining and weakening his rough nature for ever. He reminded me of certain Crusaders who had gone forth rude and bloody, to return artists, tolerant and unmoral.

I owe it to myself to lay stress on Egon von Strachwitz's manners, which were full of charm, and astonished me, until I learned that his mother was an Austrian. It was not only his military correctness, his attitudes built up on perpendiculars divided by parallels, but his easy assurance of

manner, carried off lightly, and free from that excess which makes politeness so cumbrous during periods when tradition is disappearing and there is no sureness of touch.

Strachwitz went over to the chimney-piece and watered some bloated plants of a poisonous green, sprouting from Sung bowls; hair stood out from them as rigid as that of a sleeper awakened by fright.

I decided to humour him by showing surprise at his taste for these enigmas of nature. I added that, only the previous evening, in the shop of á florist next door to the Hotel Adlon, I had noticed one of those plant monstrosities, a kind of vegetable tumour, which had gathered a queue of more than a hundred people to look at it.

"The Germans have a taste for the strange and fierce, a taste which one finds in their literature, their customs and their religion. It must not be forgotten that our background is pagan. Here, massacres have been necessary in order to convert, and at the time of your Encyclopædists there were still abundant holocausts of witches. And in these days when, for the sake of moral hygiene, we throw open the inner sanctuaries of our consciences, you see us, sir, much more than any other

people, exhibit by-products which stagger the imagination."

As my chocolate had been brought, he began to butter my bread.

"Four years of collective neurosis have helped it on," he went on. "And, above all, the conclusion of the spectacle. Since the defeat (that is the right word to employ) I have come out as an artist in seditious argument. There are more of them in Prussia than you would believe. The Bavarians are deformed by Italianism, but with us the dear Slavonic blood predominates."

With his finger he pointed out the Expressionist canvases hung on the walls, some of which were painted with cigar ash, coffee, or filth.

"You see, Kaukinski, Chagall, Kokoschka, all our leading artists are of Slav origin. The contact with the Russians since 1917 is the basic fact in understanding Germany. The Slavs are not only those fine male figures whom Frederick II. used to have kidnapped for their enormous stature. They are those men with comet-like eyes who watch us across the Baltic forests, and throw us off our balance because, without our being aware of it, they appeal to those tender impulses or to those sacred madnesses which are beyond our

control. Our chemists can find intoxication even in their potatoes. For more than two thousand years the Sarmatic amber has attracted us like loose bits of paper. . . . For the Germans, Petersburg was full of resources; Moscow, enchantment. The further Russia withdraws, the readier we are to follow her towards Asia, even though we have to undergo the fierce hæmorrhages of emigration, live like wolves, devour our innocent children, and have intercourse with beasts.

"It amazes you to hear an ex-captain of the Guard talking like this. Since 1915 the ineptness of our administration, the costly mistakes, the laxness in punishing our leaders, the stupidity of our soldiers, have perhaps worked miracles. Personally, I feel that our actual campaign of war-guiltlessness is a disgrace. On the declaration of war, I was glad to commit a crime to assert my will to power—that is my German blood. Since the Armistice, I have been happy to expiate it—and that is the Slavonic influence. I regret nothing save the years of my youth in garrison at Potsdam, the drills beneath the lilacs, like the covers of *Jugend,* and the marches past our ruddy lady colonel with her white hair—God rest her soul."

He sat down on my bed and began to pick hairs out of his arm.

"You are a Communist?"

"Naturally. The profession of a soldier is the complete Communism; it has been stated a hundred times. Temporarily, you see me, as it were, on the retired list; but before long, that is, as soon as Europe has crumbled from lack of economic organisation, I shall return to the service, for anti-militarism to-day is as out-of-date as humanitarian Socialism. What we must do meanwhile is to disintegrate, by artistic and immoral means, a world hastening to its doom. Let us help the downfall of this rotten burnt-out planet. I will tell you how to set about it. It may be useful to you. The French ought to work with us. Throughout their history there have always been precious anarchical elements, which, without possessing the speculative value of Slav nihilism, or the explosive force of Semitic mysticism, are none the less a by no means negligible contribution. Think that over in your spare moments, and talk to me about it again."

The water which I had been warming for shaving began to boil. I got up. Strachwitz stretched himself on my bed. In the glass I watched his

haggard, equine face, with its great bony cheeks and the tight-stretched skin. The thin lips and nickel teeth formed the base of the triangular chin. I was surprised at the hurrying life which animated him.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Thirty-three. The age of Christ. Do you know that Christ was a spy of the Romans? He lived for two years disguised as a woman. He was sentenced for fraud."

I wanted to laugh at his violence.

"Every French writer," I remarked testily as I stropped my razor, "even the most reactionary, has begun by such audacious postulates, only to end in complete submission to forms. In France we love bold ideas for their own sake, without in the least wishing to make facts conform to them; they are only toys. A strong being is never afraid to live in contradiction to his principles."

Strachwitz shrugged his shoulders.

"Swollen-headed Frenchman," he replied, "you are like flowers that have only one seed."

. . . . . .

It was an ancient pleasure-resort, such as Tortoni or the Grand Seize must have been in their last palmy days. Of later date than them, invoking their influence,

alone remained to-day, as evidence of their existence. I admired the prisms hanging from the lustres, the silk curtains, the tassels and faded trimmings, the shields embroidered with the Imperial arms. At the bottom of cherry damask grottoes with huge fruit motifs, bevelled mirrors and drinks and diadems glittered coldly. Ladies in feathers, very décolletée, with pock-marks, as of old kisses, on their backs, surrounded me, beseeching some gallant advance. Venerable waiters decanted warm claret, still using the gestures of their ritual, but bustled, invaded by a public composed of pimps and prostitutes; in their eyes one saw the end of a world.

I caught sight of Egon von Strachwitz leaning on the marble counter. In solitude, he was drinking negligently over his shoulder through a straw.

"This bar, or as they call it nowadays, this *kabarett,* is a sacrilege," he said, "but since there are not enough clients who can stand themselves an 1800-mark dinner, they have opened this place in order to preserve the restaurant from the tomb, and to allow a sullen public, of which we are part, to watch people dining. Here is my youth. All these stains on the plush are grand-

ducal stains. The Turk still astraddle the Balkans; comic-opera boyards, proud of their 400 springs in their Carpathians, and to drive across whose lands takes three days, hospodars in soft boots dangling with golden tassels. I once saw Cuno Hohenlohe, who was killed on the Marne, run along the edge of that balcony with a glass of champagne in his hand. And one evening I threw a Social-Democrat in to the zinc water-lilies of the illuminated fountain. Look at these nuts in their suits of dittoes: American dentists, pianists, aeroplane smugglers, abortionists and sons of Judas. Upon my word, it is only in the palaces of kings that you will come across a like humanity. When the orchestra plays *Amapa,* they turn on the blue lights; forward with your Havana cigars! forward with your red caviare! In the old days, if anyone of this crowd had ventured (even supposing that they would have let him in at all). . . . Look at this carpet, like a rich soil charged with organic matter, and these women, whose laugh is like a bottle emptying, whose eyes are heavy as oily water, whose mouths seem to have been freshly rubber-stamped on their faces. Across the violins, the orchestra is chewing poppy seeds. . . . Outside, hark to the muttered envy of the poor quarters, hark to these

trembling continents which the grids of latitude and longitude can scarcely hold together!"

He stopped and burst out laughing.

"A quiet little party with an opium pipe; that's the thing for Egon. Drugs to make one sleep are a speciality of German chemists. . . . But I reckon I shall startle my comrades in the common grave with my impeccably cut winding-sheet."

Intoxicated with his own romantic paradoxes, he held out his glass towards the illuminated vine leaves in the ceiling, to gather an electric vintage, then emptied it.

"I am going home. I see in your eye that you would like to stay to see the *Kokaïntanz*. You're fidgeting. You hazard a glance behind the dishes of crayfish. You're saying to yourself:

'Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer.'

"At your age, I too had this taste for glorifying the body: until I perceived that I had more sensuality than temperament, and more disgust than sensuality. . . . In love, I am all for the baroque, the Jesuit style. In spite of my father, I got my education at Feldkirch, the great Jesuit college in the Tyrol, and that has never deserted me. The world has remained for me an azure ball—Jesus-Mary-Joseph—with a serpent in sal-

tire. Whence perhaps my collector's tastes. Wherever I push my invasions, I shall always come back, like an Italian emigrant, like a boomerang, to my college. You see before you one who is at heart a very good fellow, and not, as you seem to think, a Mephistopheles in a pointed beard. The proof of which is that I lead you forth from this evil place."

He took me by the arm.

For some time in silence we walked. As we entered the garden, I obeyed an inward command. I called to witness those gentlemen in night-shirts, marshalled in echelon at intervals of twenty yards, wielding in both hands marble swords, who, I learned later, were the Hohenzollerns of the Siegesallée.

"Let me tell you, Strachwitz," I began, "how much I regret seeing a man like you, of good family, refined, attractive, giving way to follies instead of mastering them, abusing his charm, his health, his intelligence, and his dignity, content with naïve revolts and elementary bursts of turbulence. . . ."

Strachwitz lit a Hamburg cigar, which gave out an appalling odour.

"My wife arrives to-morrow," he said. "I had not told you that I had married again?"

He added: "Perhaps you will soon sleep with the baroness?"

I pretended not to hear.

"Have you any children?" I asked.

"Sir, intellectuals do not have children, nor do the rich. It is the people who live in holes that breed. Still, supposing that I was to have one child only. Do you want to see a hundred years hence four hundred Strachwitzes? In one hundred and fifty years, twelve thousand? In three hundred years, forty-five thousand? All robbers, slaves, workers? Or, worse still, judges, architects, ambassadors? These fits of individual imperialism must be put away. Do you think that I am a member of Germany, the prolific? You must allow that even if I did not quite do away with myself, it was not in order to perpetuate myself, like a drunkard. It shall never be said that I did not, in my modest way, contribute to the annihilation of the world."

A philosophical night glimmered in the Königin Augusta Strasse canal, on which barges from the Elbe, loaded with pink bricks, slumbered between the watery reflections of the limes. Then the lights of our electric railway flickered, lying on the turf among the Judas trees.

The following evening, when I came in after dinner, I found Egon in conversation with a young woman stretched on the sofa rolled up in a Spanish shawl. He presented me, and apologised for the fact that the baroness was not dressed; she had only just arrived from her journey and had had a bath. I do not know why she was holding a sunshade with hand-painted peonies on it.

She had a moon-like brilliance, a low forehead, a widely open nose welded to her eyebrows. Her hair was heather-purple. She made a few common-place remarks, which she uttered pompously as if pregnant with meaning. Egon picked up a lamp and made a circuit of his wife. I had the impression that he was taking a white rabbit out of a basket and exhibiting it to me, something to eat, round-eyed, feet in the air, motionless up to the moment he put it back into its nest. To complete the illusion, he scratched the top of her head, calling her affectionate animal names. She kissed him. In spite of these transports, the pair appeared to me disunited and tortured; Egon, above all, anxious to produce an effect on me. The baroness seemed far away, as if floating in some fluid, only occasionally ecstatic for no particular reason. She was gracious, conventional, telling

me that she loved Paris and that it was there that she had met Egon.

"*Nach Paris!*" he remarked amiably for my benefit. "Do you know the *Julot Tango?*"

He put on a cap, pulled up his collar and sang:

"'D'puis que l'grand Julot
a dansé le tango
comme à Buenos-Aires,
y'en a plus q'pour lui
au bal des poteaux
d'la rue d'la Glacière. . . .'

"Strike across that the sharp angle of a bar-counter of a dead zinc tone, fine mouse-grey suits, inky apéritifs offered you by a pimply wire-pulling publican; a soldier from a colonial regiment, gas, penny-in-the-slot machines, purses which look like varicose veins under the stockings; a mingled smell of cooking and lavatory; I begin to feel a little sick, and to feel that I am living faster; it is Paris."

I was looking at the baroness. Her mouth was overlarge, but expressionless. Her resemblance to an Angora rabbit continued to strike me. Round her neck, which was losing its shape, she had what looked like a collarette of fat.

Perspiration beaded her forehead.

I remarked how heavy the evening was, and how close the air.

"What heat!" she said. "I wish there was somebody to blame for it."

"I am here for that," said Egon.

"Of course it is your snakes which oblige you to overheat the flat. You think much more of them than of me, leviathan yourself, serpent with many coils and twists. I can't come into this boudoir without suffocating, and Egon knows it."

"My wife is hopelessly hysterical," he said, laughing. "She is not one of those young women who can be left in anybody's hands. Her cerebration is rudimentary, her nervous sytem abnormally developed and unconnected with the rest of her organism. Her will is submerged, owing to her having suffered severely from some feminine complaint, and being subject to relapses. Fully developed at the age of twelve, of bad stock, given to reading bad books and to curious habits, and also, you should know, liable to strange local paralyses . . ."

Irritated, I wanted to reprove him, and burst in with, "Why do you tell me this?"

"Our married life . . ."

"In my country married life is doubly secret."

"In France, you gnaw your shame in silence;

the flightiness of your sisters, the bankruptcy of your father, the cancer of your grandmother. It is very bad for the health. One must talk. That's why I always go to confession, although I am an atheist. If the crisis is severe and the priest is not sufficient, there are up-to-date establishments like the School of Wisdom at Dresden, where one can expose one's case to philosophers retained to listen to you. . . . I may tell you things that surprise you, but it is for my own well-being, so that I can sleep in peace. 'Everything which has not been uttered or done during the day wanders in one's breast throughout the night.'"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Goethe wished to say that one must free oneself by speech from those inchoate fears or unformulated desires. We subdue the gods and disarm phantoms by calling on their names. I might tell you that I am happy, and that my wife is very well. But both of us would suffer for it afterwards, perhaps all three of us. Also, you ought to know that my wife's life is despaired of, and that she is soon going to die."

Strachwitz exasperated me. I was on the point of leaving the room. But he anticipated me. Hurriedly raising his hands to his eyes, he rose and reached the door sobbing.

The baroness in her turn burst into tears, her face hidden in her folded arms. The great flowers on her shawl climbed up her back and shook as if in the wind.

"It is shameful, madame; your husband has no right to talk in that way. What would remain of society, and of us for that matter, if we had to bare our wounds in public and relieve them with such treatment?"

She was really prettier than I had thought.

I became excited, and found myself little by little overcome by the influence of these disordered, nervous beings. I began to think of those strange *ménages à trois* of eighteenth-century Geneva, united by tears, botanising, and love of one's neighbour.

I do not recall very exactly how I came to be kneeling beside the baroness. Her tears ran over my cheek so abundantly and so sincerely that they soon became my own.

"Egon has never desired me or loved me," she said when she became calmer. "When I knew him first in Paris two years ago, he wanted to kill himself, for he is full of preciosity and poetry. I dissuaded him from that, and he has never forgiven me. I met him on one of those October evenings, warm as July. You know the calm

which falls after the equinox, when the summer bears fruit a second time? It happened in the gardens of the Trocadéro. He was very handsome, bareheaded, and was giving away coloured handbills printed in French, on which one read:

CITIZENS OF PARIS!

WATCH THE EIFFEL TOWER AT 8 P.M. THIS EVENING,

TO THE GLORY OF NOTHINGNESS,

I SHALL FLING MYSELF FROM THE EIFFEL TOWER.

IN DESPAIR OF OUR TIME,

I SHALL FLING MYSELF FROM THE EIFFEL TOWER.

(Signed) EGON V. STRACHWITZ.

"He accosted me and begged me to send a letter and a ring to an English friend of his, who was living at the Hotel Jacob. I have never parted from this letter."

The baroness opened one of those desks of imitation green Venetian lacquer which are manufactured in Rome on the quays down the Tiber, and read as follows (it was in English):

Paris, October 10, 1919.

My dear Jack,

This is the last letter I shall ever write. At 8 P.M. I jump from the Eiffel Tower.

I have had a bloody career. Please keep all I have told you about Mrs. W. as a strict secret. I tried to crush my madness but I could not. Never let fate sway you, nor a woman. I am a bloody heart-broken beggar. I am longing to be dead. I tried to enlist in the Légion Etrangère but as I am ill they would not have me before I was well. My Wasserman reaction is positive. Since then, I have stolen three bicycles and a postal order. I am feeling very unbalanced. I shall jump like hell, nothing shall stop me. I hope you will avenge my death on Christianity and Society that have caused it. I am in a hell of an agony and cannot sleep. I would like to murder someone before I die. I wish my remains to be buried in the Pantheon beside those of Rousseau le Douanier. I wish I had something to leave you. Take my signet-ring.

Best love from your late friend,

Egon.

The baroness was not reading the letter. She recited it piously by heart.

"Have you ever heard anything more moving?"

I answered that I did not understand English.

Patiently she re-read it, translating.

"Well?"

"He never climbed the tower; he married me.

"Like me, Egon loved the laziness of long nails, those unspoken confessions upon soft couches in an ardent atmosphere of passion in which magnolias, those flowers like human skin, become in a few seconds black as hanged men.

"Our love rose immediately to a paroxysm. In a very few weeks we had crossed that arch running from the moment when one discovers oneself to the moment when one loses oneself. But both of us had experienced enough of life to know that we would never again meet so many well-matched virtues and vices (that is, if virtue and vice are really opposites). And so we resolved not to live separately, but together, through those cruel moments of disenchantment, exhaustion and satiety which are the fate of enervated or too magnificent lovers. Loyally we brought to the common weal all the stimulants, comforts or pleasures which each of us went to seek on his own account from dawn onwards. Would you like to know what they are?"

"Everyone possesses the humble, obvious catalogue," I replied. "Anything is better than too much facility in these commonplace affairs. Please go on."

"I cannot . . ."

Once again the baroness let her tears flow. She remained silent for a long time, her body limp. I told her to dry her tears. She obeyed me with docility.

She sat up, lethargic, her hair tumbled, her eyes baggy, the victim of some form of trance. She was unaware that her shawl had fallen down to her stockings, and kept on repeating in space:

"Excuse my not having put on gloves. . . . I ought to have put on gloves to receive you . . ."

Then, flinging her arms round me, she said:

"How good it is that you have come at last."

She was wearing stockings of the same violet as the boudoir. Her two brocaded silver mules fell into the spaces of the night.

I remained for a long time stretched beside her in the silent house. Fast asleep, she clutched my hand with all the nerves in her body, as if she feared to stay plunged in the depths of her sleep. Wondering, I contemplated this stranger without understanding how I found myself lying beside her. A sulphurous dawn slid between the curtains. I remained motionless, with open eyes.

"Why," I thought, "why is night no longer what she once was to me, a relaxation? In my nights there are no depths, no restful shade. I live in them as in the hollows of a cave, a wanderer in blackness, alone, or with my fantastic sisters. . . ."

Suddenly the parquet cracked. I turned round. Strachwitz was behind me, wearing a Turkish dressing-gown, his monocle in his eye.

I stood up.

"Sir," I began, "I am at your service . . ."

I had no weapon.

"Thank you," he replied. "If the baroness is not feeling well, the best thing is to make her a little tea, very weak."

He brought out from a drawer a small silver box. And, with lean fingers and the gesture of a pious donor, he set about boiling the water, by electricity.

BERLIN—TALLOIRES, 1921.

THE NIGHT IN BABYLON

THE NIGHT IN BABYLON

I SHALL return to the Chamber in a moment, I warn my neighbours. But I want to take advantage of Poudré's statement to slip over to the Ministry and hurry through the signing of my letters. Here is the Place du Palais Bourbon and its demonetised statue. Who will ever reveal the joys of the senses to political effigies?

The crowd along the Left Bank has dispersed. That interflow of the finish of work and the beginning of pleasure which makes Paris inimitable has ceased. At seven o'clock, with a damp silence, falls the blanket of a tacit curfew. A meridional drinking-shop, stinking of escargots, taints the mouth of Rue de Bourgogne. Next comes Sainte-Clotilde with the shadow of its trees thrown on the convent walls, and as far as the Rue de Babylone, shutters closed against the night.

I stride up the shallow steps of the Louis Quinze staircase to my Ministry. In the vestibule, like the crowd at a free soup-kitchen, wait the provincial journalists, whom I avoid by entering my room through the lavatory.

I give orders that I am not to be disturbed.

The usher is emptying away the water. His chain dangles over the slop-pail. He sees my haste, but tells me it is useless, for the House will adjourn and there will be a night sitting. How does he know? He always knows. His ugly peasant face he has preserved unspoilt. Because no doubt he retires each evening to Chaville and his salads. He makes grafting slips of the pencils, peels the *Officiel,* plucks the *communiqués,* waters the flowers of the Savonnerie carpet with disinfectant, and at the side of the radiator tells stories of the past.

In my office a fire of eight logs stands upright against the wall, a panoply of flames. I can hear warping the rose-wood veneer of my table at which Necker worked (No. 0042, Garde Meuble National). It is a well-garnished table, and all these papers whet the appetite. One cubic yard by day, without counting the memoranda, the daily papers scored with blue, the radio wires, the yellow State telegrams, the visiting-cards, dirty or perfumed, the messages: every two hours my stenographer puts it in order. Here is the row of bells: it might be the lighting switchboard of a huge store. Before crushing the first three with

my thumb, I allow myself seven minutes to think about Denyse. . . .

Let me go back to the earliest hours of this year. They had seen the New Year in at my home. After everyone had gone, I went in my pyjamas into the dining-room before going to bed. The smell of stale cigar-smoke was impregnating the curtains for a year to come; *foie gras* on the ground; dishevelled streamers; burned-out fairy-lights; from the ceiling, mistletoe; eighteen bottles under the table with their wires upright. There came a ring at the bell. I do not answer. Once again, the bell.

"Good morning . . . you. It is I, Denyse. I am a little late?"

In the dark she stumbles over the ice-pail. Her friends had told her to meet them at my flat; had waited for her until three in the morning. But she is always late. She marvels at it herself. She laughs, because everything is exciting on New Year's Day, but she is afraid.

"Light the chandelier," she says. "I am not one of those modern women who put the lamps on the floor."

She must have come down from the mountains not long since, for her skin is burnt yellow with the sun and snow, and like a white velvet mask, appears the outline of spectacles. Bright hair. Her dress makes a marvellous sound, but does not conceal her. Denyse is worth every penny of its cost. The bared brow leaves room for ideas to wander.

"I have never been in a Minister's house before. You are young."

"Do you hate that? Like everybody in France?"

When it bores her to answer, she assumes a mysterious air. She goes round the room, lingering at each piece of furniture, at each object—a young cat taking mistrustful possession of a new home.

"Let me give you something to drink. There are such curious landscapes in the bottom of glasses. . . ."

But I am there too late; she has got as far as:

"I only want some aspirin."

She allows me to hold her temples. She even lends me the support of her red, cold hands. Then after all she takes some nourishment.

Together we step across those colourless moments, neutral through neglect, which precede the

day: instants when the earth with all its sleeping riches might be his who would essay one daring stroke. Supper-parties are going home in broken lines like bats. The butchers' shops keep open. Nocturnal racket is allowed by the authorities. . . .

"You will come back again? Don't say 'Yes' because it is four o'clock in the morning and we have been drinking. Even if they tell you that I run after every woman? Good! let us be friends."

I draw her under the mistletoe. She hesitates.

"It is like marriage," she says. "First under the mistletoe, then on holly."

Poudré must be winding up at this moment. He asks for the motion as it stands. At most, the Socialists will insist on its being sent back into Committee. A vote by show of hands, no doubt.

I eat lots of meat. I love being called to the telephone during meals. My pockets are always full of introductions on odd scraps of paper. Fourteen stone three. Six foot one. The kind of

man whom women deceive, saying, "If he knew, he would kill me." Less stupid than I appear. Less intelligent than I think. When I see a funeral pass with my initials on the trappings, I smile. I am pushed forward by invincible material needs. In my shirt I am as big as others in their fur coats. I possess a police pass. I am on good terms with the *préfet* of the Seine department. I believe in auto-suggestion. I have a string of twenty knots and every night in bed I repeat twenty times: "Every day in every way I get better and better." I lend my car to my friends. I travel free on all the railways. I know *Bérénice* by heart. I do not live in pyjamas. I take in the *Illustrated Encyclopædia* by parts. I can turn the Communists round my little finger.

I have known Denyse for four months. The second time that I saw her was at the Tuberculosis Ball. I was president. Denyse! It is something completely novel to me. Up to the present women out of boldness, interest or sensuality put themselves in immediate servitude to me. Pleasant but how dull. For a sunshade, a spray of lily-of-the-valley, they would pass over the most difficult roads. Accidents resulted; exaltations that came and went; quarrels; squanderings. Each day brought its tribute; each night its deco-

rative motive. You know this fleshly pursuit which, for ten years, rings in your head? Since the war it has pleased me to imagine apparitions of another kind, closer to me by qualities the equal of my own. (I have managed to raise myself so much above my real level.) At night, in my dug-out, portents clad in silver brocade would visit me. Often they had no physical attributes, so much did I desire them above all things to be worthy, consistent, without pretence or tortuous allurements. . . . They came true on the night I have spoken of. Denyse appeared just as I had dreamed (not to speak of that emblematic beauty which came as the pinnacle of her gifts).

That explains why I flung myself at her.

I returned to my Midi after the Armistice. Nothing had altered save the properties of the wine-growers who have business relations with Cette, hastily built up in the confusion of wealth, or American war material fallen into a stupor in the midst of the vines. I had scarcely leisure to draw my gratuity, walk my dog round the sentries' beat of this fortified city where beneath a Latin sun burn the ancient Huguenot virtues which are mine and my peoples'; to find once more my adolescent dreams, my ambition, the whole bundle of ideas with which I had entered life, to take

fright henceforward at the flight of days wishing to escape before we have stamped them with our mark; to burn to tempt my fortune, and to discipline myself at last to an active peace.

Thrown headlong into the elections, on the list of a new party, I got into Parliament and on to Committees to bounce (thanks to my rubber-tipped crutch) to the head of a party group, thence to an under-secretaryship. No time to get acquainted with Paris. Just enough to despise it, to see vaguely that there is nothing left, not a cellar with anything new in it, not a drawing-room closed to one, not a litre of unskimmed milk, not a subtle pleasure to taste, not a flat to let, not a Parisian to want to know. I had been to some evening parties. Crushes between four gold-papered walls; on divans heaped with fat, deadening cushions, rutilant and ridiculous, men and women no longer capable of supporting the constraint of chairs stretched themselves side by side, a glass between their feet; young girls displayed their arm-pits in which the sweat of dances shone like diamonds; they never stopped laughing or chattering in an unintelligible cipher language, except to call out, amid the spitting of siphons, "What a bloody bore this is." I call to mind my indifference to these dangers of the city with which

people and books had beguiled my stoical youth. In my early days of office, in my furnished room in the Rue de l'Université, I used to laugh at the tragi-comedy played up here, the same as in houses where to honour the dead they continue to lay his place at table. People were eternalising gestures, puns, collars, anecdotes which they considered inimitable, but in fact there was nothing left: everything as much reduced to dust as if the Boches had blown up the city.

Often, a habit of war, I awoke at five o'clock in the morning. The birds in the Dépôt des Marbes, with screams as punctual as a clock, would gaily warn me of my trade drafting bills; I worked in bed smoking my pipe. I was resolved rapidly to get the better of a frivolous capital of an envious society, of an anarchical administration.

The seven minutes which I allowed myself for thinking of Denyse I have, according to my usual rule, devoted to thinking of myself. By force of habit, I ring first for William, the head of my private secretariat, an old school friend at the Protestant college at Nîmes. But he does not answer; no doubt he has stayed at the Chamber.

Then I ring for my chief clerk. He is a mouse who runs along the wainscoting and only arrives at my side under cover, reaching first the screen, then the filing-cabinet and the table. Silent, he stands still, his little eye convulsed, however, with the intensity of administrative life. He does not call me " old man," like William, does not blow cigarette smoke into my face, does not seat himself on the arm of my chair. With his pink skin, his gestures half-effaced, hesitant, he was provided for me by the Staff Section. Pliant bridge thrown across the gulf which separates politicians from Civil Servants, he expects me to understand the difficulties of his position. He is all subtlety, patience, courtesy. Precise, honest, inexorable, every affair gives him an opportunity to gain the ascendant over me; I am speaking of the affairs of the Ministry, matters treated without correspondence, by covert words, by telephonic or telepathic allusions, secret feuds between administrations; visitors headed off, others forced on me with infinite pains; a secret, intuitive, transparent control of my correspondence; the observance of a tacit etiquette of Far-Eastern subtlety; mysterious or decorative use of the share of power which is entrusted to me.

I raise my eyes. With no noise save the stifled

sigh of the padded door, in single file in order of rank, all my section chiefs have entered behind my chief clerk. They stand in a circle round me, gloating over me. United by the most extreme ties, hate or love, drawn together by years of life in common, they enjoy this truce, and the visit they pay me is to them a relaxation. In the midst of their colourless voices rises alone my gross demagogic voice. They bring me their letters in portfolios of morocco. Satisfied at having given to their day's thought so appetising a form; typescript lightened by stainless margins, enriched by the catchwords at the foot, ornamented by the formulæ of courtesy, crowned at the head by the title in capitals. It is to all appearance the mere dispatch of current business, but beneath it are disssembled partiality in interpretation, problems solved by passion such as their hearts have dictated. If I resist, if I think I see traps, they keep in the background, gaining time, refusing battle, manœuvring the length of the corridors or of precedents, until the next Government. If, on the contrary, I good-humouredly wet my pen, they smile and slip before me the letter to sign, press another on me and, counting on my inattention or fatigue, magnetically direct my pen on the paper. Then they withdraw backwards, happy in having

brought to their Ministry this monster of a thousand doors, which they love and which loves them, a delicate morsel which the animal will not accept save from their wrinkled hands.

Something clicks; behind me a little nickel plate falls forward on to the mahogany board, disclosing the words: *Chamber of Deputies.* It is Cornet, my colleague, at the Prime Minister's office. He tells me that the House is up and will not sit again until nine o'clock. Dinner at Larue's.

The equinox. A mad-brained wind rises, whetting the appetite, arousing one's humour and the desire to give interviews; everyone sucks up the oxygen which it brings. Summer Time artificially rejuvenates the day. It is an elderly coquette's trick. The Place de la Concorde appears: Babylon with the Euphrates, the gardens, the obelisks, the palaces of Nebuchadnezzar. The world is a vale of tears, but, on the whole, well irrigated.

To-day I am dressed for happiness. This suit is five years old. When I am in it, everything goes well with me. It is natural that one will not give up the clothes, however worn-out, in which one has met good fortune. . . .

Rue Royale. My car crosses another car, which slackens pace and chokes as it changes speed. In absent-mindedness, I look out. Inside are three persons. In the middle a young man, handsome as an actor; on his chest he holds two women who are kissing. . . .

If Dupré lets fly at the Chief this evening the attack with which he threatened him from his seat just now, the only thing is to demand the adjournment of the discussion. Fix no date. Ask him to come to an agreement outside the House with the Minister of the Interior; then drag out the affair until there is no reality left in it.

. . . One of them was enclosing in her hands her friend's face, leaning over her and letting a long pleasure flow between her lips as one gives a draught to a puppy, holding him by the muzzle. That had lasted, perhaps, all the way from the Opéra?

I might have taken this as one of the irrational sights that Paris offers; be amused at it—men generally are—say with a laugh, "No Man's Land," and pass it on to my neighbour; handle it

myself; endure it; forget it. But to suffer from it? To be pierced by it as by a bullet?

There comes back to me the day on which Denyse, while having tea with me, discovered in a drawer of my desk some photographs of women, old loves. . . .

"Lots of them are very pretty," she said.

Out of romanticism I offered to tear them up.

"Don't do anything of the kind, or else, give them to me. I shall like looking at such pretty women."

At Larue's, Cornet was waiting for me. "I'm hungry as a hunter," he said, cleaning his nails with a fork, the seat of his trousers dark on the salmon plush. There was no need for him to tell me the bad news, for beneath the palm-tree in the entry the parliamentary journalists were marketing pessimistic information, while a squad of waiters were arranging the *hors-d'œuvres* on the table-cloths with cracked folds. Zermatt has turned his coat; he has been promised the Governorship of Algiers. The Democratic Left and the Liberal Entente are ratting; three mem-

bers of the Government are patching up an understanding.

"It'll be two hundred and fifty, or two-eighty at the outside, if they divide to-night. The Chief won't stay after that. Besides, we know now who the article in the *Aube* was inspired by. . . ."

With his hand Cornet makes a sign that it comes from an exalted quarter, away above the ventilators and the private rooms.

Between two cream blinds one divined the Madeleine and its flower markets, hanging on each arm like baskets of flowers. Three theatrical managers were dining near us. Stung with red pepper, traces of urea on their foreheads, they bandied about the prices of engagements. Our friend, Ravissant Grigri, of that vast population of women who have bad digestions, though admired of young men with boneless noses and soft nails, was following them, hiding beneath a smile tipped up at the corners like a pagoda, pain-racked organs and a bored heart. Impassive, some American tourists were eating corn on the cob.

Among jaws at work one heard the *maîtres d'hôtel* gliding over the roses of the carpet; beneath a pressure which dentists estimate at three hundred pounds, the frail bodies of fowls were

cracking. Digestive, hands in pockets, thoroughly comfortable in his boots, Cornet was looking in the mirror to see if his hair was arranged to its best advantage. In a voice from the stomach, stifled by the alimentary bolus, he was talking about "imponderables," and letting fly anecdotes, the object of which was to reassure as to the future of the social order, in return for a few after-dinner concessions.

He used to pick up out-of-date Parisianisms, dragging on the pavement these thirty years, and dressed them in a country accent, saying he had heard them on farms.

He ran his eye over the wear and tear of Ministers:

"Dubech is in a lunatic asylum; Courtois climbs trees. Have you seen Bovet dishing with his left leg?"

The first violin advanced towards us, holding poised on his instrument a flexible waltz, which he suddenly pours into our fruit plates. I can stand it no longer. There is still half an hour before the resumption of the sitting. The *chasseur* returns to tell me that Wagram is asking for me. I feel that the Government is saved if I can see Denyse.

In spite of Cornet's explanations, I cannot

make out why the Chamber has not accepted Poudré's motion. It was a clause very clearly drafted on which we had all agreed unanimously at the Cabinet council that morning. At all events, the question of a vote of confidence should not be raised brusquely, which, they say, is the Chief's intention on the resumption of the sitting.

The thing I love most in the world is Denyse. She has reconciled me to Paris. A city that breeds hearts like hers deserves some tenderness. I shall never forget that evening on the staircase. I was taking her home. The light on the landing was not working. She took my hand in the dark and against my eyeglass: " You shall see what a very straight little woman you will have."

In her room. I found her in bed. The Boulevard Bineau is as silent as a town after a fall of snow. The quilted counterpane scarcely billowed over her. Bed suits her better than the loveliest frock. The sheets cast on her face a light which animates her.

I remember, too, one evening on the Boulevard Malesherbes, when Potin was closing. They were tucking up the pine-apples in their little cradles. We sat down on a bench. I asked her to marry me. She answered that she did not see any need.

I went on.

"When I try to say your name before someone, it won't come; it sticks in my throat."

The shops were like flowers that open in the morning and close at night.

"And I——" she said, "well, when I see your name in the papers, my ears burn."

From the way her eyes went cloudy, like aniseed in water, I felt that she loved me. She lowered them to her muff. The clouds were dancing on the horizon.

"Three cheers!" I cried. "For the things which are beginning!"

Denyse's is a secret nature, very proud, very shy.

"A spring shut up, a fountain sealed," says the Bible. But everything proves to me that she prizes me. I mention for satisfaction only the pleasure I felt the first time I made her cry. Or again, her way of repulsing me and saying, finger to mouth, "Be good!"

(Modesty becomes them so well when they have

it, so well when they no longer have it that I can scarcely conceive of women who do not desire to possess it.)

I am not a sceptic like the people here, who own everything. I pluck my pleasure with more passion and more simplicity than was ever possessed by anyone before me. To-day God rarely visits us, and yet for seven years have we not poured libations enough, from blood to green Chartreuse? But He has abandoned us, and in my turn I give Him an offering—women, tall half-open vases, big children all warm.

It is so pretty in Denyse's flat, so home-like. A striped paper, pistachio colour. A jonquil carpet. On the walls fine Louis Seize engravings. Lace lamp-shades. Gallé vases. Everywhere, in the fringes, in the crochet patterns, the hand of woman, as at my Aunt Emma's. Her heliotrope makes my head whirl, and her chemise a hundred times crossed, never closed. Above everything I long for her glance. When we are in each other's arms I make her open her eyes quite wide. It is a curious moment. Until then, one had before one eyes which saw; and then suddenly they dilate, open on to an inward abyss, and there is nothing in one's arms but a stranger who revels alone in her passion, twisted like Laocoon.

The Laocoon of the Salle des Pas Perdus, how many parliamentary crises has he seen? . . .

Denyse is dozing. Politics bore her. We have nothing much to say to each other. My mother knew by heart all the Ministers of the Interior since the 16th May. . . .

I explain to Denyse (she has put a " y " into her name. She puts it into everything) that I want to take her down to my constituency. She would take electoral apéritifs with me in villages in the evening after the speechifying. There is a clatter of dishes. The harrows come back, their spikes in the air. The smoke of stews climbs straight upwards. One drinks with harvesters who all day have been lifting sheaves by the waist, with the employees of the Caiffa coffee-merchant, in the single street, its pavement decorated with hop-scotch pitches, lame cats and burst eggs. My dog would run to meet us with a bone, put it down to bark.

" Don't stamp like that, you make the house rock," she says. " It is like sleeping in the train with lamp-men waking you by walking over your head. Don't shake my bed, either."

I admire her faculty of passing hours in doing nothing, saying nothing, thinking nothing; I, to whom speech comes so easily. She has read much, but says she has no head for books.

I tell her we shall never part. When I am Prime Minister everyone will know why I absent myself about nine o'clock. I am going to my old flame. I shall preside at congresses out of which wars come.

"Stop it. Don't make plans: it is no use."

When I think of her happily, I see her on my right; but all my gloomy spectres appear to me on the left.

Denyse seems restless. She does not listen.

"What are you thinking about?"

I try to enter into her thoughts by surprise.

At first vexed, abashed, she does not answer. Then:

"I am dreaming," she says, "just dreaming. They are so diverting, these images crowding on one another, coming without being called. . . ."

Sometimes she does not hesitate.

"I am thinking of a horse, of my tortoise-shell comb."

One would imagine that she is trying every means to escape me, that beneath each word is hidden a memory which she will not deliver up.

"And you, what are you thinking of?"

I am scarcely more frank, but my reasons are different.

"Of my country, of humanity."

The bell.

"You're expecting someone this evening?"

"No, nobody. . . . I didn't hear a car. . . . Perhaps it is Laurence come to see me, a neighbourly visit. Sometimes, you know, when she is not operating in the morning. . . ."

Of course it is Laurence. Friends of Denyse, we are enemies spontaneously. Chance arranges that we never meet, but we know all about each other. More exactly, I feel that she knows my methods. To me, hers are less familiar. They have always disquieted me, displeased me. I am like a man in the open watched on by an enemy well under cover. Can a man have, towards a woman, feelings that another woman cannot understand? For my part, I do not grasp the meaning of Denyse's friendship for Laurence.

Laurence with her abstract face, in which every feature is occult, puts me off the track. It is from her strength that she draws her influence,

from her reputation as a surgeon; from her life, which she quotes as a model; from her moral structure, which she willingly puts at everyone's disposal as an example. An attitude of scandalous rectitude, an affectation of sacrifice, tight lips. She likes startling by her efficient strength, her aversion from pleasure, her infallible judgment. She says she is wilfully severe to herself so that she can be pitiless to others. Finally, a taste for the suffering of others, whether in surgery or friendship, which always makes me shudder.

Denyse loves her like a sister. It is to Laurence's home in Brittany that she goes to rest in summer; it is Laurence from whom she borrows money, to whom she telephones every evening at seven o'clock. To her she owes her bank, her tobacco, her handwriting, her habit of not dining, and numerous gestures and intonations.

Laurence puts down her cape, leans over Denyse to kiss her. They stay hooked together, for the shawl of one is caught by its fringes to the other's brooch. Then I remember the car I met just now in the Rue Royale, and the same invisible sniper pierces me with the same bullet. All the savage, primitive gestures by which men manifest themselves to a woman, what are they beside this

secret understanding, these rites by which two women recognise or please each other? Beneath this calm air are they perhaps triumphing brilliantly over me? If the fancy took Denyse to entreat a more gentle presence than mine, would her attachment lead her to these grey hairs, this sombre cloak decorated with palms and the Legion of Honour? I would like to laugh at the idea, feeling the approach of an evil for which I know no remedy.

It is ten o'clock. I can stay no longer. The presence of Laurence spoils my farewells. She has installed herself so close to the bed that I have to slip between them, and I reach only the tips of Denyse's fingers. Unable to be despotic—her look begs me not to be—I am extremely ceremonious. She thinks to reward me.

"You promise me to telephone if there is anything fresh at the Chamber, dear? Otherwise I shall be distracted. . . ."

I shall come here no more. I have great strength of will. I have never yet given way to a woman. For that reason Denyse is afraid of me. Ought I to ask her not to admit Laurence? I do not seriously believe that this evil sister with flat heels. . . . But Denyse is so simple, so

modest, that when someone admires her beauty, her first movement is to make an offering of it. She would go to the length of giving up her pearls. . . . And yet—her necklace is increasing, one would think. Laurence's grows less. How can I explain this idea to her? I am a strong man, not a clever one.

"In the face of such evident collusion, in the face of this secret understanding, the object of which, if not fully acknowledged, is certainly most obviously intended to destroy a social harmony which has proved itself, in order to replace it. . . ."

The shorthand writers are soaking their shirts in following the jerky delivery of Longuemare who, as spokesman of his party, is developing his arguments for a vote of no-confidence in the midst of a stench of civet-cat. The House is crammed. The ambassadors in evening dress, women in low-necked gowns, have come soon after dinner. Starting from the grill, all these lights, this file of motors as far as the Gare des Invalides, and the chauffeurs reading the *Intransigeant* (late extra)

beneath the headlights, this fog obscuring the faces round the tobacconist's shop, and the journalists in the Salon de la Paix—free-lances, old hands, women reporters—who were recopying the party motions, drafted during the adjournment and were dictating by telephone,—all are sufficient explanation that the situation is grave.

Immediately after the much applauded Longuemare, the Chief mounts the rostrum. He is tired, bent double, his eyes hollow, traces of soup on his necktie. He speaks in a curt, dry, irritated voice which is not his own. He will resign this evening, he says, if he has not the full confidence of the inter-Republican parties.

His vitality is dried up, and he contrasts ill with the triumphant gilded Victories hovering beneath him in a mahogany sky and mouthing mute trumpets. A livid after-dinner sunlight falls upon heads as wan as the allegories on the walls. The President of the Chamber leans over the rail, perturbed as if he saw a leak. In the midst of a vitiated atmosphere, in which truth and good-humour turn sour, the overwhelming ceremony of the division is taken. People scatter warnings, encourage each other; the supporters of abstention take flight in their numbers. The telling begins.

Still, Denyse's nature is so sweet. Full of attentions. Sometimes she telephones me, "I have nothing on; does that make you happy?" Generous and good. I know she loves me. I was wrong to fly into a rage. I am strong-willed, but not in all directions. Here I am, writing a little note for her to have first thing to-morrow morning.

> "When I arrived, darling, the game was lost. I did not have to take part. To-morrow, no doubt, I shall be free. Will you come with me to Morocco? I am thinking of Ma Coquille."

Then the corridors, which had emptied themselves, wash back their double tide. Longuemare's motion is declared carried: three hundred and seventeen votes to two hundred and eighty-two. The Government has resigned. Tumult. The bell tinkles thinly, soon diluted. Cornet's voice:

"You're worse than idiots; you're curs. Dissolution."

The Chief rises, takes his leather portfolio and crosses the amphitheatre. We follow him.

"I wanted," he says, "a majority to govern and not a majority at one division only."

It is too late to go to the Elysée to-night.

A space forms round us. The photographers have gone to develop their negatives. Friends come unconvincingly to shake us by the hand, to recommend their relatives for grades of the Legion of Honour, for collectorships. The typewriters have ceased their machine-gun fire beneath the green lamps. On the steps several aged personalities, collars turned up, handkerchief at mouth, let it be understood beneath the stars that the President of the Republic will summon them to-morrow morning.

I walk along, hat in hand. Since I have little hair left, the night coolness reaches me at once. I have no desire to go to bed. I take flight. It is one o'clock. Whole parishes extinguish at a stroke. The police wear out the asphalt. I feel the approach of one of these nervous crises which are new to me, and which I fear. Are they perhaps due to my wound, to overwork? Sometimes serious disturbances. I tell myself I would like to do such and such a thing, but will my nerves support me? I have only the outward appearance of health. My memory. . . . I must go to-morrow to see if I am diabetic. Shall I be able at seventy to preside over a Cabinet meeting after a night in the train? Our fathers were cast all from one mould. In the country I could get

calm on a fine evening like this. Once upon a time I loved coming home alone along a road clothed in moonlight, held between the wet ditches and croaks of the frogs. These city nights are like truffles, scented, dark, bad for the kidneys.

Grief at my table has his place e'er laid.

A verse which I once constructed at school. It comes back to me. I grow sentimental over its profound meaning. I ought to have been a writer. Shall I go back to the Boulevard Bineau? Possibly Laurence is still there? If it was a man I would go and see him to-morrow and have a few words with him. Perhaps she will stay the whole night? Denyse likes someone to hold her hand while she sleeps.

I am back at my Ministry. The night-porter is snoring on the velvet sofa. My table is in disorder. Again, here are the bells, the rubber stamps. The carpet is strewn with rumpled papers, ripped envelopes. I uncork the speaking-tube which hangs the length of the window. I blow down its mouth but no one answers. Letters from constituents, from friends, from lunatics, free tickets, catalogues of big sales. I laugh at the sight of my feverish notes of a few hours

back; figures, notes of interrogation. I clear away; little by little appear those futile tools which I found on my arrival and which to-morrow, on the clean table, my successor will meet for the first time: the pot of gum, the scissors, the pin-cushion.

For a long time I do my accounts before the open safe. The cash must be handed over as from to-morrow morning. By the aid of the butts of my tear-off diary, I review the ten months of my administration. What overtures, intrigues, visits, promises! If at least it had been in order to build, to leave something behind one, a happier country, healthy finances, less distress, less hatred. . . .

I try to think of something else. Voluptuous memories make my eyes smart like ammonia. I go back to the window. On the black lawn the allegorical statues make islands of light. I feel so luckless, so feeble.

The firemen on their round, lantern in hand, enter my office.

San Remo, 1922.

THE NIGHT AT PUTNEY

THE NIGHT AT PUTNEY

IT is rarely that one hears a very swarthy gentleman in a pink flannel shirt, as he leans over one, say: "Without *fatuosity*" (I will cut off my moustache if it is not the truth) "I have a very *ascending* position," . . . and, what is more, have it.

Thus Habib, lying on his side in the varnished cabin, his chest pushed out over a plaid, like those tanagra funerary monuments which, by his attitude and his Oriental face, he resembled so closely. From a point situated beneath the roots of his hair one single eyebrow descended, and a hook nose on which, like pieces of butchers' meat, hung thick underdone lips. Below, a doughy chin and sky-blue cheeks which the *poudre rachel* made shine like verdigris.

In the old days the major commanding the 32nd Auxiliary Hospital at Marseilles (the same who treated the gangrene cases with brandy) could not let slip so good an opportunity.

"You are the carpet merchant?"

"Habib Halabi, at your service."

"With a name like that you can always sleep out of barracks without a pass."

But Habib would answer, "By your leave, sir, by your leave, madame," never look you in the face, and never lose his temper, even when, having kicked his behind, we said, imitating him, "Magnificence, your desires shall be executed." And he justly considered the medical officer a sore rather more incurable than others. By this method, he had us all. At the hospital, where I myself was an unhandy auxiliary zouave employed as a clerk, he remained for four years, seizing on the secrets of beauty while attending the face-wound cases. And as every trade in France (the country where there is no unskilled labour) becomes an art, from a butcher he became a sculptor. Four years passed in dodging roll-calls, the Foreign Legion, in having

Baladi et balada
Cacahouètes et chocolat

said to him by the officers of the *Armée d'Orient,* in smoothing his hair with the help of a pocket-mirror, in eating iodised veal, in turning his amber rosary, and going through the medical

examination every Friday with a test-tube full of borrowed albumen.

To-day, one nightmare driving out the one before, we have come through to the real life, the life one wins after the life one has lost. The major has retired and fishes for eels; the disabled have formed themselves into a trades-union; the nurses have secured either a husband or a *concierge,* and to the day of their death will never again spend the night out.

Habib alone has set sail for his great destiny. He never speaks in anything less than hundred-thousand franc-notes. He looks so prosperous that people with no need of money ask him for some, just on the strength of his appearance.

His English is impressive. He takes lessons in order to be able to pronounce, without an accent, *Claridge's* and *romance,* the two most difficult words in the language.

The short and complicated journey between Paris and London is a distraction. On the morrow one will regret Paris and its avenues decorated with trees, urinals, kiosks, benches, its rich soups, its corner houses with six storeys of filet-lace curtains and Barbedienne bronzes; its municipal stars, its miniature bridges, the Seine, which the second-hand books prevent from over-

flowing its banks, and each face in a café like an artist's proof. One will think of that damp pasturage, the Plaine Monceau, of its skies in which the great pink tramways make holes, of the artists' studios (dating from the time when Art still existed), of its Renaissance mansions, all plush and ironwork, through the closed shutters of which filters Brahms, and through the pavement vents the smell of *cardons à la moelle*. But for one's first night, London is sublime, with its great shafts of light rising or falling in thick shadow, soft as otter-skin. Odorous and deserted streets; at low tide, OYSTER SALOON, and on an imitation rock, glassy oysters in their death-throes.

From the entrance to the main lines at the Gare du Nord, at the place where one consults the forecasts of the crossing, everything smelt of salt water; but on the other side, at the arrival platform, on the contrary, it is Paris which one inhales all of a sudden, and the smell of soap-suds borne on the draught from the Rue Lafayette. At Calais, night has fallen, and the lighthouse of the Gare Centrale begins its luminous strokes. A great wind sweeps the territorial waters, laden with the dust of Boulogne cement.

It was at this moment that the steward, carrying on the tips of his fingers a tray with tea-things, asked room to pass. He opened the door of one of the cabins de luxe on the bridge, beside the wireless, and I recognised Habib. His head was thrown back, his eyelids dark brown, hemmed with curving lashes. I saw him foreshortened like an anatomical specimen (of which at the very first waves, when the bile had got into his blood, he took the colour); his moustache, twisted with *pommade hongroise,* went sharp up his nose and blocked the wide, hairy nostrils.

On a camp-stool stood a dressing-case with enamelled fittings, from which an old Armagnac perfumed the air.

"Bibi, old man, you look very comfortable in there!"

He disclosed the blue cornea of one eye, let a glance slip out, to which he knotted a smile from an 18-carat mouth, and took a sip of tea without removing his butter-coloured gloves.

"For a fatty tumour on her scalp I am treating the wife of a director of the board of the South-Western, now in Paris at the Ritz. When, as to-day, bad weather prevents crossing by aeroplane, they reserve for *Bibi*—you get me?—this extremely *sympathetic* cabin, the State cabin,

the one used by members of the Cabinet and by King's Messengers."

A diamond flashed and its glitter made the word Ritz gleam once more in my memory with the same damp, rich fire.

"My time is worth twenty guineas an hour, more than a thousand francs at the present rate of exchange, and I am in *Who's Who*" (he pronounced it "Vo-Vo"), "you know, the English directory."

It was at this point that Bibi, in a voice as hollow as a gramophone when the sapphire is worn, told me of his "ascending" position. Now, I had known him when he was broke to the wide. Dead broke in 1917, when, with the best will in the world, there was nothing to do except bow one's back to circumstances; a pig's-head pie and the Paris-Midi for a plate, one's overcoat turned right-side-out after having been worn inside-out too long, paper in one's shoes, celluloid collars cleaned up with a sponge, an adjutant's képi for putting one's head in at the booking-office claiming the right to reduced fares, nights under the stairs, dawns when one combed one's hair with one's fingers, cleaned one's boots on the curtains, brushed one's teeth on the lavatory towels, and exacting women, who paid one in sugar. In spite

of everything, he lived courageously, feeling by signs, mysterious yet sure, that for him and his like, the second-hand furniture dealers, the rug merchants, the carpet-beaters, the false relations, the dealers in certificates of dipsomania cures, the receivers of stolen spoons and pekingese, days of incredible prosperity were drawing near once the Aryans had done one another in with their local quarrels. Indeed these years were possibly no worse than those of his childhood (sleeping in the grass with the asses, while his father lent money on the silk crop, exported apricot-kernels and sold, beneath an open umbrella, picture post-cards to bounders come from Palestine to recuperate on the slopes of Sanine); or later, when his mother, the dressmaker, took him when she went by the day to the house of the wife of the Italian consul (he had thus become a *protégé* of Italy) and they had settled in Beyrout, that town of confectioners and Jesuits, of money-changers and Greek bars where, during the tableaux-vivants, American missionaries would throw magic-lantern texts on the cottonclad flesh of the *figurantes*.

"When I left you after the Armistice, I set up on my own account in the Rue Victor Massé," he said, chewing sunflower seeds, of which his pockets were full. "Perhaps you've heard of the

Æsthetic Institute, as you live in the neighbourhood? In the autumn of '19, I was employed as bathboy at the Semiramis Baths in Leicester Square. A queer place. It was open all night. Polished customers and unpolished pavements. Princely tips from demobilised Canadians. Next spring I opened up Habib's Beauty Parlour in Bloomsbury. There, fortune overtook me."

History, like an idiot, mechanically repeats itself. It was one of those lucky chances of the East, the flight of the magic carpet above Bagdad, misery crumbling at the blast of eighteen golden trumpets, the mob cowed by the dexterity of the freed slave, enchanted by his doubtful origin, his black fingers filled with dubious charms, the palaces built in a night amidst a welter of amazement from an Occident void of contempt or wit. Paris is too clear-cut, and the French genius an uneatable jelly, from having been clarified too much; but London never fails to yield these storybook chances. Out of the smoking mud rises a vapour in the midst of which there takes shape that Oriental city, which appears also from the Alhambra's promenade, behind black velvet curtains, towards which files the line of dromedaries along the Embankment each evening, bearers of luminous publicity. Just there, at the stage-door,

behind Charing Cross start the Hebrew inscriptions, the sale of Coptic documents, precious stones "on paper," the fragments of tiaras, the realisation of pawn-tickets, the trade in drugs in little red China tea-packets, a whole messianic traffic, shameful and mighty.

Above all, Habib had arrived in time, at that precise and delectable moment when the riches of this world were just passing from the hands of English lords into those of Russian Jews.

The sea was rough. It flung itself against the side of the boat, just above the water-line, with dull thuds, followed by a swelling douche which washed the deck.

Habib, *alias* Bibi, had assumed a confidential tone, that is to say, his violet lips remained steady, with a tiny slit at the right-hand corner out of which secrets flowed. Amicably threatening, he covered me with a kind of gold Browning pistol, his cigarette-case, stuffed with fat rose-tipped Abdullas like cartridges on a Cossack's chest.

"You twig . . ." (he used a street slang, today in its grave, which survives throughout the Levant: that is how he came to misuse the word

"sympathetic" by applying it to things: "a sympathetic bedroom," a sympathetic cigar-holder").

"Yours truly owes all his success to an old gentleman, just like a little strumpet. An old society actor, Aloysius Marsham Moon, at the age of seventy showed symptoms of galactosis of the male, and insisted on the removal of his mammary glands. He was spiteful, knowing, and had much influence over the young American society women who had married into English families. They dared do nothing without him. He formed them, made them laugh, cry, or, at least, lost their Yankee taint in the vinegar of his company. He taught me, as he did them, to understand Han vases and Picasso. He gave exquisite little dinners with black candles, arranged marriages, led his flock to graze at Covent Garden, took them to tea with Berenson (who explained to them that Titian had never existed), conferred with them and their eldest daughters when the latter reached the age of marrying a dukedom, taking his share in edifying that compact block, inwardly composed of mortal hatreds, but outwardly unchangeable, which is formed in every country by the ladies of the American colony.

"In spite of the worthy Moon's insistence, I refused to operate. I strove to obtain a resorp-

tion of his chest by electric massage and succeeded. In less than three weeks I had a clientele from among the richest people in London. I installed myself at De Vere Gardens in a dainty little white and green box, which I left last spring for Hanover Square, where I shall expect you, old scout."

"Toothsome work! a change from the facial butchery of the glorious past, eh? What is your line?"

"Everything. I fight against Evil. Medicine, if you get me, is only the minor and momentary skirmishing with sickness: as soon as it becomes chronic, nobody is any good. Now I, on the other hand, I wage a war which lasts for years. I catch Death when he is still tiny. That is how I succeed in taming him. I direct my attack against jaded nerves, neuralgia, boils, superfluous hair, damp hands, baggy cheeks, snoring, colic, nightmares, twitchings, freckles, obesity, hysterics, change of life; I vanquish stammering and goose-flesh."

"You are a great man, *Sir* Habib."

"Not yet," he replied, nettled. "Oh, I was forgetting: halitosis by iodides. . . ."

"?"

"And melancholia by electro-magnetism. You might say that a whole city is clutched in these paws. Look at these fingers; I have insured them

for 15,000 guineas; they ought to be put in a casket, like amber cigarettes, with a crown on the lid and '*As supplied to the Royal Family; exclusively patronised by the aristocracy and the diplomatic corps.*'"

He held out to me, from his rose-coloured wrist band (turned inside-out after having been worn the right way, for, despite his elegance, Habib could not bring himself to change his linen), two hands soldered to hairy arms, decorated with a gold identity disc, hands like those on an anthropometric chart, short-thumbed, square-fingered, ticketed "elementary hands," from which emanated a magnetic fluid, powerful but very coarse.

"They are a luxury, like Bibi himself, like everything he touches. Luxury and super-luxury, since nowadays one has to refine upon everything."

And shivering, he hid them in his gauntlet gloves, and then under his travelling rug. I admired Habib, though I had often met Orientals like him, never thrown off their balance by the shocks of fate, cynics, who leap over all the barriers of misfortune, who shriek before a finger is laid on them, adapting themselves in a flash, never surprised, always insolent, magnetic, strong-minded enough to leave the gaming-table with their winnings still in their pockets. And, for

these very reasons, freely assisted by strokes of fortune, such as only their tribe and women know; making incredible progress in a few months, their behinds still black and blue with the attentions they have received, but their brows already radiant.

"You must see some pretty bodies!"

"Bacon and pork. And just as often, hop-poles, with flat breasts hanging to their ribs like espaliered fruit sucked dry by the field-mice; no hips and cold feet."

To me all women are charming. Besides, I have the cult of English women. Of the classic type of those who say: "When they *are* pretty . . .!" so I interrupted him with:

"Fine skins?"

"What is the use of a good skin if it is not stretched, supported by what is underneath? Ah! you must look a long way for those three ridges of the stomach, and those twenty centimetres between the breasts, which the ancients insisted on. What one finds too often are hollow thighs, loose in their stockings, a waist down below the knees, and, what is worse, pretentious, receiving one in funeral rooms, up to the eyes in debt, but with censers of *Chypre* at five pounds the bottle, telling fortunes by tea-leaves, changing their homes once

a week, getting on to every kind of horse except that in their dressing-rooms, making one come back again at midday because they can't wake up in the morning; or too ticklish. Tell me rather of the lovely shoulders of my own country, used to carry loads for centuries past. . . ."

He kept vivid his Oriental taste for plump women. With his thumb, he sketched ideally in the air their praiseworthy contours.

"Irishwomen and Jewesses, being fleshier, balance the reckoning a little. Amongst them, you often find goddesses. But above all I must tell you about the women from the colonies. Most European women are easy to attend to; they are well looked after. But to describe to you all that come to me from the four corners of the earth! Indian Army wives with their chests and necks tumefied, their skins ruined by polo in the sun; women back from shooting in West Africa, with white wrinkles in black faces; wives of Egyptian Civil Servants, with limbs cooked by the sand; those of Chinese customs officials, crippled with gout and gravel from drinking cocktails; goitres from Rhodesia, and skin diseases from Australia, to go no further. . . . Through Hanover Square the Empire files, used up, aged, ruined by its local

doctors, warped by every latitude, and goes away re-cured, caulked, in full æsthetic convalescence."

Habib found comfort in expatiating on the weakness of his patients, overwhelming with his scorn all these women hungry for youthful beauty, to whom he owed his prosperity, fierce as a servant, humiliated by his toil, who spits in the dishes.

"What a brute!" I said to myself.

The wind ceased whistling, the round walls of the waves which we were drawing along at our side, flattened out; we entered the harbour. Through the port-hole, cleared of its steam with a sweep of the sleeve, the port appeared, lighted up for this fête which all dry land brings. The bottles ceased shaking in the fiddles, and the customs officers climbed on board. Habib wrapped himself in his frogged beaver coat, his hat on the back of his head, and addressed a message to his wife on the knees of the telegraph boy.

"Let me see, old scout, you don't know Mme Halabi? She is a oner, worse luck; but I can't do without her. Jealous, lying, imperious, she brings me good luck; and carries me, and all my fortune, on her robust shoulders, the bitch. Come and make your bow this evening in my box at the

Opera. . . . No. 28; they are playing *Samson et Dalila*. . . .

" . . . *comme s'ouvrent les fleurs*. . . ."

Lighted trains level with the wooden platforms, long misty windows of the Pullman cars, promised a victorious entry into London, all light and jollity beneath the ashes of its fog, after a mad rush across the night and the hop-fields of Kent.

Habib had his place reserved in the first train; mine was in the second. Playfully he lifted his green felt hat very high, and for a long time I watched beneath the glare of the arc-lights on the platform his tarred head, cynical and enthusiastic, which dominated his body like that of a handsome convict.

. . . . . .

In a scallop of warm shadow, my cheeks still burning with the sea wind, my ears still full of the sound of drums, after the train dragging its scrap-iron through the night, I sometimes dozed, sometimes stretched wide my eyes. Nothing could be seen save the gilded caryatids wilting beneath the weight of so many artistic spectacles. But on leaning forward one caught sight of the figure of a

singer feigning emotion, like a geometrical figure in a circle of limelight. Finally an aigrette of spun glass shivered, and its gleam was followed by the rustle of a frock.

Habib was not in his box, but, that his sins might be forgotten, he had sung my praises, and I held the place of honour between Mme Halabi and Mme Mangematin, the French dressmaker of Albemarle Street, which carried with it the right to acid questions and to sweet-minted answers. Behind us a foreign officer looked after the cloaks and protected us from the draughts.

Mme Halabi, clothed in screaming monkey and a dress of flame-coloured panne, asked for explanations; she leaned towards me, hungry for information, friendly, spongy. I told her that Samson was nothing but a Babylonian solar myth.

"They can find nothing new to invent nowadays," she sighed.

By what witchcraft would the scene finally crumble like a box of bricks?

Round us spread a scent of pralines, of soothing balm and metal polish. Mme Halabi, her broad face heavy with plaited tresses, looked like an empress from a pack of tarot cards, with a bitter and majestic eye. Malice was written on her face like an advertisment. At once irritated

by the desertion of the doctor and proud of his successes, the victim and the beneficiary of his audacity, the only person who had nothing to regret from his loquacity and familiarity. Fearing to have to catch him *in flagrante delicto,* and yet desiring to, for the consolation prize which would follow from Lacloche. Over him she exercised a dictatorship to which he submitted out of interest, fear (did not his forehead carry the scars of plates met in full flight?), and superstition. He escaped from her behind the padded door of his consulting-room (the door which, by reason of a tacit veto, he could never bolt), and by waiting on clients at their houses. Mme Halabi was German. To better her position, she said she was a native of a Free City. He made her acquaintance at Eski-Baba, where she consulted him for a local irritation. When she knew the real cause, she wanted to throw herself out of the window. Love is also an affection of the skin. Habib consoled her, took her to Monte Carlo and begged her hand. They would tell each other their fears, slap each other's faces, collect Imari porcelain, tell lies to each other with a spate of "on my honour's," count up the till every evening, help each other to get rid of their scruples. She used to cook him kebabs in yaourt.

The curtain fell, the chandelier flamed out, and the spectacle was transferred to the auditorium. Habib came out of a box at the side, and moved towards a neighbouring stage-box. He changed his mind and came in our direction. Here, as everywhere, he was at home, but more especially in that abode of terror, a theatre on a subscription night. Faces, crushed by the boredom of the show, began to come back to life. Women mechanically put their hair in order with the tips of rosy fingers, pulled up the shoulder-straps of their gowns, rubbed their lips and their rings. There were backs full of small bones set on each side of a knotted cord, backs with the muscles of market porters, large backs flat as paving-stones, backs that itched and backs that were at peace. In all, or nearly all, the boxes, as in the cubicles of a Turkish bath, Habib recognised a client. He sought my admiration with his eye, found it, savoured it and smiled, passing a finger between his collar and his too fat neck, as cooks do to prevent a pudding sticking to the mould. He had his hands full of trophies, press cuttings, orchids, glacé sweets, appointments and cheques, which he tossed on to his wife's knees with his national "by your leave. . . . Madame . . . by your leave. . . ."

"I was forgetting this *bonbonnière*. Look! one chases all round the world, but it is always in London that the final tableau is staged."

"The result," I replied, "is colossal prosperity."

"So they say. But beware. Russian jewels bring bad luck. Already this country has the sea round its neck like a halter. Have you noticed that everything here is up for sale? Advertisements, and still more advertisements; the sale-rooms full; they are liquidating their house-boats, Georgian houses, deer-parks, desirable residences, shootings, silver plate, trout streams, eighteenth-century old masters, everything which helped them to have a good time while the world was working . . .?"

Bibi did not go on. He did not allow himself to theorise.

"I don't trust my ideas, only my fingers."

He possessed, indeed, more fingers than ideas; which is usually the case with famous leaders.

"The Grand Duchess. Stage Box B. Come and see this close to, old man! Come along!"

I tried to get out of it, but he came back at me like a fly during a nap.

He looked at himself in a glass, adjusted his

watch-chain, rubbed his pearls with the under part of his sleeve, smiled to himself.

"Nothing impresses me, not even myself, for I was born in a little village which has existed for two thousand years, and where they still find traces of twenty-six civilisations. *Mâloum!* What do you think of my coat? You must admit that I've got myself up like a white man, as they say."

Then he wrote in his notebook: "To-morrow, Wednesday, 6 P.M. Grand Duchess. Full jet."

Pale as meat that has been bled by the press, the Grand Duchess stood with her fat marble cheeks upheld by a dog-collar of pearls, watery eyes, thick joints, a nose like a whetstone, and that shyness by which certain royalties are recognised. Inclined to those spontaneous confidences which result from congenital isolation and which, always betrayed immediately afterwards by a servant, add to the evil reputation of royal houses.

She would say that she ought to have been a boy, that she would end her life by marrying either a coal-heaver or an ambassador. She received Habib daily. Each day she entrusted to him the scaffolding of her beauty. Next, she dragged through life a heavy desire to amuse herself, to drink, to spend, to be in everything, *mit-*

machen as she would say in German. In her, the hanging of her father, the shooting of her brother, the eating of her children by dogs, the selling of her lands, and several suicides, had changed nothing of that formidable ingratitude or bad temper of which the spoilt children of fortune are examples. From not knowing how rich she was, she had become so poor that she did not need to count. So that she could see no difference. Moreover, she did not say, "I am rich; I am poor," but, "My banker is kind to me; my banker is unkind." And with all this, that universal Teutonic taste for embroidery by lamp-light, heart-to-heart conversation, and photographs with three generations drawn up in rows. Bitterly she came to swell the ancient list of refugee monarchs, those "if-I-had-only-knowns" of Chislehurst and Twickenham.

"My sweet Bibi! Beast! I thought you were not going to come."

The Grand Duchess, with her dreamy temperament, was naturally lifeless, but she lit up again at the approach of a man, and shone like a candle.

"What opportunities this man must have!"

"Your Imperial Highness must know that to me every woman is the perfect nourishment, a

universe in which I sometimes find happiness, often pleasure, and always my means of life."

(Habib was no Don Juan, as you might think. He did not dislike flirtations, but Mme Halabi was enough for him.)

The lady listened with a charmed laugh, theatrical sighs, a manufactured emotion, betrayed by the eye of a realist occupied solely in running over us down to the waist. She contemplated us as an epicure a good dish. We all three stood at the back of the box, in the little drawing-room. Darkness had fallen once more. She accompanied us to the door and the blue lamp.

As we prepared to withdraw, she stopped Habib with her hand.

"Frankly, how am I looking?" And unfastening her draped dress, she disclosed a big, shapeless body like one of those Early Romanesque columns to be seen in Spanish churches, sheathed in eighteenth-century damask.

"Upon my word, very well," returned Habib, irritated, and anxious to get away. "Lovely as the moon."

She displayed this poverty-stricken body in the mortuary light. She insisted:

"Really and truly? Still desirable?"

(Habib muttered an oath between his teeth,

something like "May thy house be destroyed," an event which had already occurred.)

"Of course," he replied out of cowardice and weariness, and with that seriousness which never deserted him. "Of course, completely."

. . . . . .

Skies decked with billowy clouds, seamed with thick telephone cables; banks behind grills, where they distribute money with a coal-shovel; houses with green doors; wash-leather gloves; Paris hats on which sprout early fruits unknown to Paris; a torrent of workers who have got up as early as 11 A.M.; it is noon in Hanover Square.

One of the great houses on the west side of the Square, with a columned porch, two clipped box-trees, gold net in the windows, steps of the whiteness of a shirt-front, and a very modest engraved copperplate below the bell. A Rolls-Royce in front of the door, and also a couple of those run-abouts which ladies wrapped in panther skins drive by themselves in the morning, and which wait alone in the street, the steering-wheel chained and an Aberdeen terrier on the seat.

A servant in livery, with white-washed hair, showed me from the marble hall into a room painted deep cream. It was certainly not the waiting-room of the ordinary beauty doctor, in

"improved Louis Quinze," as the German catalogues call it, with advertisements like "Thin busts! A lovely figure in twenty days," spittoons, a heap of *Life,* crochet antimacassars, diplomas with reproductions of a chin-strap, and the boastful gilded currency of *hors concours* exhibition medals.

A Venetian suite embellished with finely gilt shells, console tables with malachite slabs, rested on a royal-blue carpet, like a fleet in review order on the waters of a quiet harbour. The pure Syrian taste, that of distress warrants, was visible only in the chair-covers with ball fringes the chromolithographs, the ewers with scented soap, and a sham Khoracan. On the mantelpiece, thousands of invitations in the frame of the looking-glass and seventeen photographs waiting to be leapt over by an august horsewoman enclosed in an engraved silver frame; between the horse's shoes was written in an imperial handwriting: *I am delighted with everything that you have done for me. Frédérique-Jeanne.*

Among the smaller portraits there were ladies in ball-dress and tiaras, others in easy chairs, a Grenadier Guardsman, and the scrawled autographed appreciation of a literary Cabinet Minister.

The eyes are the window of the soul.
They are serious rogues made to carry into hearts that delicious distress, the forerunner of love.
I was sick: your asphodel mixture worked miracles.

Near this letter, still more kings and queens, with that gentle resigned air which can be seen on the lithographs of them pinned up in pointsmen's boxes. In an adjacent cabinet, a telephonist, helmeted in nickel, was occupied in engaging Habib's immediate future on three lines, Central 1665, 66 and 83. This room was like the heart of the city. Luxurious houses, whole wealthy neighbourhoods paid it tribute, submitted to its law without revolt, as indolent colonies submit to that of a conquering, active state.

The door opened and Habib appeared, thoroughly fresh at this hour of the morning, with that powdered brilliance of singers during the first act. A little shaving-soap was drying on the lobes of his ears.

He was wearing a black tie with pale blue stripes, the old Etonian colours (when he had really been educated at the Marist Brothers' School at Jounieh), which is considered by the English a far graver crime than the illegal sporting of a decoration is in our country.

He took me by the shoulders, and threw me against a padded door which slammed heavily to.

"This is going to be the death of me. I've got to work like mad. Still two clients to deal with before lunch; at three, I'm due at Newmarket to look at my horses. Bloody swindlers, you know, trainers and jockeys. But I won't give up until the daily picture-papers have reproduced yours truly a million times, in his grey top-hat and frock-coat—*stambouline,* as they call it in Pera—leading his horse into the paddock and being congratulated by the King."

"Vanity?"

"Publicity."

Habib pulled back the horizontal and lateral blinds, uncovering windows through which a livid light, already much used up by the suburbs, was partially admitted. We were in an interior court, transformed into an hospital. I preceived an adjustable bed, gigantic puffs in the talc powder, a cask of vaseline, sponges and rubber gloves between jeroboams full of bright-coloured lotions.

"Put on this blouse," said Habib. "You shall have some fun. Reminds you of the hospital in the Rue de la Prison, eh? I have still Mrs. Harpye to do, remodelling of the face; and then Pamela Moyss, general electricity. You shall be

my assistant. After that, rest. We can pick a toothful. And none of your bread and butter and tea with water-cress, you know. I have told the Café Royal to send me up a bottle of the ripe '93 Richebourg. Nowadays people are all for vice and cold water. Yours truly sticks to pleasure and good wine. That is his strength.

"There! look at my notebook; it begins all over again at five o'clock; Max of Albania; a foot pumicing for a Chilian woman; five-thirty, a depilation; six, a douche for the Grand Duchess, etc., etc. Number one, Mrs. Harpye. She is the wife of the Under-Secretary of State for Imperial Transport. I make her sit still for two hours. We are paying off an old account between us. At first she ran me down in official circles, but now she has come to it like the rest. Well she knows what that has cost her."

So saying, he raised his right hand and, after rubbing his fingers, threw it out before him, as if to get rid of the gold dust, that admirable mimicry common to all the Levant; "the sign of the piastre that rolls away."

Habib went out muttering something about "strafing the very guts out of her." (He had picked up a certain number of these war expres-

sions, which are only used now by neutrals visiting the battle-fields.)

He came in again leading by the hand a lady infinitely grand, with a puerile air, very old and very noble, all white like a plate, her eyelids closed.

"Blind?" I whispered.

"No. But I make her spend two hours with her eyes shut every day to let her eyelids rest."

He held out to her a glass of liquid, which she sipped, between teeth as black as pearls and then spat into a basin.

"Gargle of water-cress juice, to prevent softening of the gums."

While speaking, Habib had made Mrs. Harpye sit down. He smeared her with vaseline, covered her with cloths, as a sculptor prevents the clay from drying, considered her with a not wholly professional scorn, and cried in her face:

"Admit that no one would have given much for your skin before you found me?"

"Not much," she admitted.

"Nothing lasts for more than a certain time. . . ."

It was some minutes before I perceived that beneath these scarcely polite exchanges was concealed a mutual esteem. Like two cats, they

sometimes licked one another, and sometimes spat in each other's face. At the actual moment that he let Mrs. Harpye slip from him, Habib caught her again with charming words, with happy gestures, with the recovery of an acrobat. She found in him the same gross forms of behaviour, to which her own drawing-room successes were due, but magnified; point-blank compliments, intimidation, abuse, friendly or malignant invective.

He attacked her cheeks, his two thumbs in front, treating the hollows under the eyes, bringing down his fingers from the temples to the nose, then taking the chin in the centre and coming back again towards the ears.

"One must suffer to have a good skin."

"But I have a good skin," protested Mrs. Harpye. "I have scarcely any wrinkles."

"It is the good skins which wrinkle."

Bibi started humming the tune he used to sing as a child in the orchards full of oranges in Aïn-Sofar:

> Light of my heart,
> The flower of the vine
> Shall drown in the river,
> When thou are not mine.

In time to the tune, he kneaded this precious face, grunting as he worked the rare leather. Then suddenly:

"Are you going to let the French send their battleship to my country? Yes or no?"

"I can do nothing. I handed your memorandum to my husband. He says that if the ship hasn't arrived the fault is the F.O.'s."

Habib stopped, threateningly, his hands heavy with grease raised to the ceiling.

"Nothing of the kind, I have my own information. It is his office which insists that dear France shall not be represented in our territorial waters."

He menaced her with an eyebrow brush.

"Understand: I hold you responsible. For what are you a member of this freemasonry of 'souls', this secret theosophical association of women, etc., etc . . . whose influence stretches to beneath the council table of the Cabinet? Tell your husband this evening, since you share his room . . . (which reminds me, don't forget to weigh yourself before you get into bed), tell him that the massacres are going to begin again. Look at the telegrams from our committees. . . . *'Time is short. Immediate aid'.*"

His greasy fingers crashed down on the white telegrams.

"Perhaps we shall come to the end of watering the earth with our blood, perhaps. . . ."

She raised her gummy eyelids and stared at the light with an austere red eye.

"You are a nuisance, Habib, but I can't do without you."

It must be admitted that in contrast to many of his compatriots, who refer to their origin unwillingly and try to make people in the West forget it, Habib was a fervent patriot, though he restrained himself from personal sacrifices.

Nationalism had only recently touched him with its grace; a surly and solemn feeling which he was prone to impose willingly on those who, like Mrs. Harpye, have since the war given up knowing to what geographic entity any recent nationality corresponds, and content themselves with a polite bow every time someone shakes a new flag at them.

She listened to him in consternation, not daring to interrupt, ready to swallow any new insults, provided that he wiped out her crow's-feet.

Habib, still discoursing, covered her again with a false rubber face, which he tied on top of her head, substituting an immobile red mask for her

pale face. As he forbade her to return before the question of the battleship had been settled to his satisfaction, she stamped:

"I hate you; you are a horrible Levantine."

Tears coursed over the india-rubber. . . .

"God! what a brute you are," I said to Bibi, when Mrs. Harpye had left the theatre. "She'll never come back."

"Not come back. Pouf! She bears her shame as joyfully as a dog his whip. Do you know what she said to me as she left: 'When do you begin the electrolysis treatment for my acne?' That is how we stand! Besides, she has asked us both to dinner on Thursday."

He was magnificent, obviously. His face-powder had melted, and an Oriental beard, welded to his hair, growing into his mouth, that hole in which was hidden a fortune in dentistry, was sprouting again. His eyes fascinated one. His body when at work gave forth a strong animal smell through his silk shirt; a thick plumage could be divined through its transparence. I recalled one summer when we were bathing at Vieux Port, the major laughing at Bibi for being as "hairy as a bear." Incongruously he had about him the assured air and studied gestures of great vagabonds, captivating as one of those story-tellers

one sees in Oriental cafés, bringing more charcoal when the hookah goes out.

This time it was in the electric-treatment room.

"By your leave . . . madame . . . by your leave. . . ." Miss Pamela Moyss, of Drury Lane (who never enters except through the trap, in the guise of a white cat pursued by George Graves, and only makes her exit by the flies, hung from a steel wire, so that all the public schools can see the spectacle of her thighs twice daily throughout the Christmas holidays), lay there naked, her back on the operating table, like a nymph in summer wantoning on a field of white enamel. Her legs were so supple, so loosely attached to her body, that they looked like another pair of arms.

He addressed me.

"Hold this gadget for me. No, no, there is an ebonite handle; it is not for dogs."

He leaned over this famous skeleton like a lecturer in anatomy.

"She looks clean-run, delicious," I said.

"As *provocante* as you like, on the front page of *The Stage,* smothered in aigrettes. See what's

left of her. No pelvis, the skin of the stomach glued to the back."

A roller in his hand, connected by a green cord to a cabinet ornamented by ampère meters with round eyes, in which little needles quivered with emotion, and by switches in a row on a white marble keyboard, Habib moved a metal roller to and fro over Miss Pamela as over a stony road.

"Round back, curved vertebral column, owing to over-indulgence in games. . . ."

Among the sparks, he discussed in icy tones this lecture-room specimen.

"Don't be afraid; she doesn't speak a word of French. And even if she caught on. . . . Men are idiots who believe that successful women expect to be told that they're lovely. It's pessimism that they want served up to them. Your absolute stunner says, 'I have so little confidence in myself.' You think she is joking? Certainly not. I agree with them heartily. I am an *agent-provocateur* of women, just as my father, Chafik the Compassionate, was an *agent-provocateur* of the Turks, when the silk crop failed. One secret of the success of us Orientals is that the idea of not trusting ourselves never enters our heads, while, at the same time, we always distrust other people."

"Get along with you!" I said, imitating the

street tinkers, "I mend wood, iron and porcelain."

"You may joke, but when I think how much beauty costs other men and what it brings me in. . . . Look at this thing here. . . . What one wants to know is whether it's better to be disfigured by virtue or fatigued by pleasure? . . . Well, she isn't one of those who sleeps all day to appear younger in the evening. What a life! I don't think!"

Miss Moyss was indeed a great noisy gutter-snipe, always worked to death, never tired, dribbling bottles across her house, with a nose reddened by the sham snow of the cocaine she obtained by carrier-pigeon from Darmstadt, giving way to excess at table—both above and below—keeping lovely Russian girls, etc. . . .

Static machines, of strange shape, terminated by glass arms or by copper balls, like chained-up mastiffs, held out their leaden surfaces to impudent little brooms.

"See what is going to stroke you, my pretty one, like a fine feather duster and spread over you the soft emanations . . . of sheet-lightning."

Miss Pamela, with her legs in the air, was learning a new part:

Let's all go down to Brighton,
To Brighton by the sea,
To see if the champagne tastes of salt,
Down by the sea.

"Oh, how you're tickling me!" she said. "I love it!"

Habib put a vibratory helmet on her head and seated her on an insulated stool. She looked like a model posing for some war monument. Then, into position over her head, he drew forward on rails a pointed douche, which darted evil-looking stalactites at the patient.

"Rhythmic vibrations are particularly recommended for their tonic value in cases of anæmia, physiological trouble, depression. . . ."

At this moment the voice of Mme Halabi made itself heard.

"Bibi! Bibi!"

"Curses on her religion. You see how she listens, every time she hears this machine in action. . . . I am with our zouave."

This appeared to reassure her, though it did not check her conjugal monologue, screamed out loud, as one hears from windows in the East.

Habib, at length, put his mouth to the door:

"Do you want a taste of the stick?"

The whole burlesque of this clinical comedy

sprang to the eye. Each of the players lived his part to the life. Miss Moyss waited, chewing fruit gums. The great galvanic baths slept in their green mud. Mme Habib's voice died away.

"She is not very pleasant, you know, when she's in a temper. One raging day she threw a gramme of my radium down the closet."

He signed to me and I turned a handle, bringing together the poles of a battery.

Immediately he brandished the lightning. One heard the tearing of silk, the cracking of whips. It reminded me of Maskelyne's physical experiments at his Theatre of Mystery.

"Put a finger on her."

I touched Pamela and was traversed with shocks. He held me, I her, all three riddled with the same tingling, as if about to dance some electrical farandole.

This was the point at which the serious work began.

All at once an alarming but domesticated thunderbolt fell from the ceiling upon Miss Moyss. Her crushed muscles, scarcely held together by their tendons, leapt; her few plump parts gave way. As if from the effects of terror, her capillary system quickened at one bound; her fair hair, supple as silk an instant before, stood

up trembling; violently her breasts were hurled against her ribs.

A smell of ozone arose, and she who flew up skywards every evening on a steel wire, became nothing more than an electric demon, a pythoness contorted by her prophecies, a shining hedgehog, caged between bars of violet fire, shot from the copper brooms, beneath a livid daylight, for whom all hope was to be abandoned.

. . . . . .

One afternoon, while we were jostling the rhododendrons in the Park during our walk, and Habib was explaining that he could cure also from a distance and give his clients treatment by correspondence, I became irritated. Without beating about the bush, I compared him to the quacks on the back pages of French newspapers. He shook the diamond on his finger, like a red lamp when a train is pulling out.

"Who knows if this is not the true medicine?" he answered. "Every moment college professors are making the same gestures as Nigerian witch-doctors. Centuries stand between incantations and anæsthetics, with practically the same result. Do you know the history of medicaments ? Of diseases ? Of surgical engineering ? Naturally not, nor does anyone."

He pulled out a gold pencil-case scrawled a word on his card and handed it to me.

"The main thing is to understand. You go tomorrow to the house of Sir Charles Vallery Succombes, a Canadian homœopath and a friend of mine. Like all well-known people, he's out of town. But they'll let you go over his museum of medical history, which is one of the unknown marvels of this city of mysteries. Admittance is far from easy, but Habib opens all doors."

It was true. In the heart of London, along Wigmore Street, the street of antiques, of tiresome Delft poychromes, of court dressmakers and chiropodists.

I entered a small house, decorated in middle-class style, furnished with large monuments of black, highly-polished wood. After a short delay I was admitted to a windowed gallery, from end to end of which it would have taken five or six minutes to walk very quickly. On each side of a triumphal pathway of linoleum, glass cases displayed scientifically the whole history of medicine, from the earliest charms up to the instruments of precision of our own day.

This cabinet of natural curiosities disclosed its childish talismans: amulets from mummies; little dried moles' feet, in sheaths of antique silk, against epilepsy; keys from which pierced meteorites were suspended, charms against nightmares; hands gloved in red with two extended fingers, such as hang from Neapolitan balconies; fetishes; Polynesian healing-stones; relics of the year one thousand, and other pious frauds, born of a like faith.

As I passed without noticing the history of the artificial eyes, an old man-servant, like a Chelsea pensioner, who was accompanying me, rebuked me. Had Habib been present, he would have explained to me that, in an age when medicine was still at its most primitive prescriptions, the study of the æsthetic was already springing into life. From antiquity there was evident progress in the art of repelling attacks on beauty: Egyptian alabaster eyes; false corneas in ostrich egg-shell; silver eyes from Rome; Italian removable eyes of the seventeenth century. Suddenly a leap forward to 1815, the first porcelain eyes, French eyes with an indiscreet stare, with a burlesque glassy astonishment, watching the return of the Bourbons.

Next, the instruments of child-birth repeated

across the ages their quartering work; this, a dilator of the time of Augustus; there, monstrous forceps for the lying-in of goddesses. On the wall, papyri, illuminated manuscripts, scenes of maternity echoing with the same ghastly cry which greets our bleeding entry on this earth.

Now came the syringes, bone cannulæ, hollow bamboos, pewter enemas, like heavy guns, pus-pumps like long ivory whistles, engraved with the arms of haughty nobility.

Next, I learned the tale of amputating knives, starting from razor-edge flints, arrows from the Pacific for lancing abscesses, hand-saws from the great battles of history; over there, trepanning drills on the Dutch operating-table, which recalled the accursed racks in the Hague Museum.

I went down a few steps and found myself in the anatomy section.

Mysteries of the human body, first a sealed jar, sacred threshold across which religion forbade entrance, treated from without by incantations or sacrifices, furtive experiments in dissection, ivory statuettes from Arabia, of which the stomach could be lifted like a lid, to display the internal organs and the fœtus in section; then the French anatomical models of the eighteenth century, in pale wax, so accurate even by then; on a

rosewood table, with even more precious marquetry work, there lay a delicate feminine body dissected up to the neck, with powdered hair, sleeping the sleep of a sham corpse. And unforgettable too was that strange lady of the First Empire, life-size, Neapolitan work, split down her length, half neo-Grecian robe, half skeleton, as if the dead body issuing from the tomb had left half its dress beneath the flagstones; and likewise those Japanese statuettes, on which, to avoid the necessity of undressing in the doctor's presence, one marked the centre of affliction with a paint brush.

Certainly the most complete collection of skulls I have ever seen (I love these games of bowls), skulls with the baked tints of caramels, or whitened with lime, or the patina of old ivory, Arab skulls, whereon were engraved verses from the Koran, or inscribed tribal marks. Inca skulls, incrusted with turquoises, silver and mother-o'-pearl; taboo skulls in their leather cases, striped with crudely painted scars; skulls from the Congo studded with votive nails; and those mysterious human heads which the Peruvians shrink by a secret process to the size of a fist, tiny black grotesques, which keep their proportions in con-

striction, with the hair itself dwarfed, exquisite monkeys.

As I was preparing to depart, my conductor, who was preceding me like the leader of some funeral choir, satisfied at having seen me climb the steps of initiation, beckoned me to follow him down an iron staircase. Two floors below, the electric light suddenly revealed a vista of cellars, and I made my bow to all the gods of the curative art, and their priests, pharmaceutical or therapeutical. Olympian gods with beards like Greek bankers; horned Mexican gods with frog faces; ithyphallic deities from New Zealand, with toothless gums; Aztec statues of Death; Kafir demons in tall hats; negro witch-doctors with rat's-paw collars and raffia beards; Chinese priests holding rhinoceros-cups for decanting poisons; Pelletier and Caventou discovering the ten alkaloids; effigies of side-whiskered Victorian doctors, with the banners of their corporations and their diplomas, and, still pale from her assassination, the white figure of Miss Cavell upon a throne.

As we advanced, I discovered in the obscurity evil instruments, which had sprouted there beyond academic bounds: night-stools, groaning-chairs, crutches, *ceintures de chasteté,* with a wealth of fastenings unknown to us, Chinese torture-chairs

with knives for the back, German iron masks for processions to the scaffold, Spanish nailed whips, opium-smoking apparatus seized in the East End, bellows from the days of Elizabeth for resuscitating the smothered, doctors' walking-sticks with narcotics in a removable pommel, votive offerings of terra-cotta representing packages of intestines, hernias, ovaries, tongues; iron mechanical arms of delicate seventeenth-century work, displaying the austere grace of the furniture of the period; Syrian urinals, whose iridescent reflections flashed in the gloom, sinister dolls for casting evil spells, pierced with cactus needles; a collection of all the objects which have passed through the human body, glasses, spoons, inkpots; poisoned crocodiles' eggs for the suicides of caste chiefs, bowls against sleeping sickness, enemas of black leather set off with gold to facilitate the motions of kings, and curious cocoanuts hung on the ceilings of harems to provoke fecundity.

Suddenly there barred my passage, challenging me, an inhuman apparition, which resembled both mushroom and gentle-worm, like those you see swarming in the bottoms of the eggs of the divine Jerome Bosch and the Flemings of his Expressionist school. It was clad in an oilcloth cloak,

pus-coloured, faceless, lit by owl's eyes separated by the horrible black beak of the masks in Italian comedy, a nose full of aromatic herbs: before me stood the puppet of a London physician at the time of the Great Plague. First guest of a whole subterranean party; clinic scenes of which the figures in these airless caves, finding their way across the cables and sewers, avoiding the Tube, met in consultation their brothers in the neighbouring gallery of Mme Tussaud. Alchemists in their caves, where in the bituminous waters of the ceiling swam crocodiles and flying-fish amidst poppy-seeds; summoned by a stage brasier, monstrous alembics tested the results of gigantic formulæ inscribed on the walls and distilled rosy juices. Here, a barber's shop, in which a man, bound by the arms to the legs of the operator, was being scalped in a puddle of blood; there, Liebig in his first laboratory, deaf to the cries of a lunatic (of the reign of George I.), imprisoned in a padded room of the period, and treated by the executioner's tools. At ease in his Louis XV. shop-front, a Turkish apothecary, in the midst of antlers, narwhal horns, Majolica pots of ointment, weighed in his engraved scales some poisoned coffee, which he offered me.

Habib was right. The empirical traditions of sorcerers, of these kings who cured by their prestige, of these primitive surgeons of the Stone Age, who trepanned to let the demons escape by the holes, of these mythological physicians, of these distillers of mystery, of these divine soothsayers, were carried on by him, better than by all the licensed apothecaries; he was nearer to the truth than they were, because he had no pride, approaching the least known and most redoubtable forces, subduing them or in sympathy with them, inspired doubtless by those Gods of the East who sleep in the dust of his village, and above all by that first one, who, five thousand years before Christ, protected the physicians of Chaldea, Oannes, God of the Depths, whose acquaintance I had just made, and made it never to forget. I departed, determined to tell Habib that his art was obviously connected with metaphysics, which since the days of Hippocrates had been erroneously separated from medicine.

. . . . . .

We are a score of guests. The mistress of the house is not yet here. After a moment of embarrassment, we have all got to know one another, like the first day out on a voyage. At last

Mrs. Harpye appears, so hurried, as usual, that she does not wait to be among us before beginning to talk. While still at the top of the staircase she addresses us. She comes running in, her gold brocade dress held up in her hand, bites her lips, and offers a smile in as many shares as there are guests.

To some people she says, "Ah! you are dining with me? How delightful!"

Habib greets her with ceremony. He gives that first imperceptible melting glance at her jewels which all Orientals give, but it has disappeared as soon as his bow is over, that side-to-side, up-and-down glance, which out there they call derisively the "sign of the Cross." He considers these museums of bedecked shoulders and breasts, ready for the rites of the evening, like an author listening to his own work being recited in a drawing-room. He is wearing a dress-coat, with jet buttons, which owes its set not to the excellence of its cut, but to an elastic. His button-hole is flowered with a camellia, like a kind of pale salad; it arrived that evening straight from Nice by the Riviera Flower Express. As an Italian said of him the other night: *"tutto vestito di lusso"*—"dressed entirely de luxe."

At table, as a distinguished foreigner, he sits on the right of Mrs. Harpye. A Lord Justice makes a pair with him. At this alimentary tribunal, Habib sits girt with silver, with candles, flanked, like a prisoner who can depend on his counsel, by two ladies, whose noble titles plead in his favour. A benefit performance in his honour. His stomach well assured, his legs at ease, he wears that rich air of Levantines who sip their raspberry ice while having their boots polished. As soon as the soup appears, Mrs. Harpye, her face open as a great store, leads the conversation with all the assurance and superiority of those in this country who can conceive and express several ideas consecutively.

On the table, porcelain allegories dance quadrilles. The looking-glass of the centre ornament reflects the champing mouths in reverse, and it surprises one that the food does not fall up one's nostrils. An added note in the worst of taste, negro servants, dressed in white damask, hand round pine-apples on Charles II. dishes.

From time to time a ring is heard, and the butler would raise the cover of a Chantilly soup-tureen, lift out the telephone, and hand it to Mrs. Harpye. She thrust her nose into the mouthpiece

as if into a champagne-glass. She made signs that nobody was to take any notice of her, but went on listening to every side. She laughed, and the whole of her tumultuous life fled down the wire and, like lightning, dashed away to lose itself underground.

She planned to make the conversation general, and therefore laid siege to these slower guests who only leave their own dull thoughts to pass into drunkenness. She was talking as she had lived, at random; loving in zigzags, having abolished night, burning her underclothing after wearing it once, knowing no forgiveness (that moral washing-day), despising the Radicals, their dowerless daughters, their H-less speech, but tolerating them because they dispose of peerages and viceroyalties. In spite of all this, conversations took the normal course which they are bound to take here, flowing in one direction up to the second course, automatically swinging round each guest in turn and going round the table in the opposite direction. Mrs. Harpye shivers as if one of the alternating currents from Hanover Square was passing through her chair.

"Habib is quite impossible. Last night, someone was reciting poetry here. He threw a Minis-

ter out, telling him that we were among society people, and we'd have nothing to do with a damned lawyer. All this because my husband refused to interest himself in the non-Mussulman minorities."

She looks at Habib with pride, in the way that the gardeners at Kew on Sundays contemplate the exotic fruits which they have succeeded in growing despite the climate. She has both contempt for him, and faith in him. She will put him on a level with the peerage, but on a level with herself . . .?

"Ireland would have had peace a year earlier," she says, "if the Viceroy had listened to Habib." Or again: "Habib thinks quite rightly that wars are cosmic phenomena."

But she will just as soon say to him, across the table: "Get your hair cut, Habib!" or "You're a horrible, dirty-necked Levantine!"

Habib pockets it, knowing well enough that he will have the last word, and will overreach them all. As for Mrs. Harpye, he will see her again to-morrow, her and her wrinkles: he will make her cry, for she is a child. Of all these empty words, nothing will remain except that lasting malice which is not the least sweet part of our friendships.

Sugar in three colours was served with the coffee. I helped myself to the pink, in crystals like bath salts.

In the smoking-room I told Habib that I had admired him between his two neighbours. He bunched his nails upon his lips, and then threw them outwards, as if under the pressure of some invisible bouquet which had come magically out of his mouth, and he clacked his tongue.

"You didn't see much of my hands, did you?"

And he gave me a slap on the waistcoat which broke my watch-glass.

All round us, ladies draped like indoor plants, with trains which described volutions; some, of commanding aspect, with tiaras put on like helmets; others, with Bengal fire at their ears and a look so soft that they seemed to be saying, "You are killing me."

"So different," I said, "and yet so alike. 'My beloved in her nakedness would be like thine in hers,' says Faust to Wagner, a phrase which much distressed my tenth year."

"No single part of the female body is a matter of indifference to me," said Habib sententiously. "I knead it, I deform it, I re-form it. My re-creations do not last, but, what is there that lasts? Do His?"

And with his finger he pointed up towards God, away above a chandelier held in the beak of an eagle painted on the ceiling.

"I at least give warning. To the old women who leave my hands, I say, 'Go and do it quickly, for you have only two hours to run.' Ingeniously, devotedly, optimistically, I re-dress this battle-line, from which they return more sorely wounded each time."

At this moment a servant came to tell Habib that he was wanted on the telephone. He sent an answer that he would not be disturbed, that he could not understand the English when they talk, because they always have soup in their mouths, and asked for the message to be taken at his house.

"This is why," he continued (believing himself, like the smallest Levantine donkey-boy, to be the centre of the world), "that is why all women are my allies. The moment there is one near me, I introduce myself. We understand each other at once, like the two poles of a battery. God knows if I have been thrown out of houses in my life! You may believe me if you want to; *never* by a

woman. With one glance, you understand, I look deep into them, without even the help of one of those exploring lamps, thanks to which nowadays one goes literally right down into them. I know what they love, whom they love, their age, their past, and often even before they know it themselves, I guess their secret of motherhood. That knocks you? Don't you see, Bibi is there and is not there; he is no doctor, and he is much more than a doctor; he does everything and nothing is done to him; and as he's taken care not to belong to the world, the world belongs to him."

He rambled on in this way, automatically distributing to himself heavy gilt-edged compliments, pledging the future of others without compromising his own, chasing away care with a hand as light as that which he had once used to frighten away flies in the pastry-cooks' windows in Naples (he used to pick them off without touching the powdered sugar, an art much appreciated by the customers).

The servant came back, took the liberty of insisting, brought him the telephone on a tray. Someone was telephoning from Putney.

"Speaking. . . . Ah? . . . Ah? . . ."

Habib turned his head towards me, still listening, made a grimace, and changed colour.

"On no account must she be moved. I'm coming."

. . . . . .

A limousine, its front nickeled above the mud, brought its white tyres alongside of the pavement. A sea squall was washing the square, wiping out the chalk pictures which the crippled unemployed draw on the flagstones. It was surprising that the pavement did not pitch at all. The night, like an ice at the end of a dance, was turning to water. The wind whistled, shaking the sash windows, but without those joyful slaps which the shutters give to French house-fronts.

Habib turned up the collar of his coat, leaving a loophole for his cigar, his feet in a fur rug. In the depths of the shadow his eyes were thrice lighted up by three street-lamps.

"By dint of entering women's houses by the tradesmen's entrance," he said, "one ends by having all the secrets of the household at one's fingertips. One runs errands, one mends things, one cadges; there is always something more or less to be done in these factories. If you only knew how solid these frail machines are! Hard as hope! They endure things which would cost a man his head a hundred times over. And all because they

have the taste for living simply riveted in them. . . . You are going to see one who is very ill indeed, from what they tell me. She could have summoned the old family doctor. . . . You know, these English doctors, except for the few who have worked in Germany. . . . Not a bit of it! It is yours truly that she has summoned! And why?"

"Night," I remarked, looking at him, "brings counsel, strange counsel. . . ."

Dark four-square chimneys, white letters climbing up them, butcher-shops with Australian meat frozen by the arc-lamps, giant advertisements, drew themselves up in ranks along our path.

After Putney Bridge Habib took the speaking-trumpet in his hand and directed the chauffeur. First we climbed the hill. As we reached the tableland the Heath was visible, dotted with black trees as bare as old-man's-beard.

Occasionally a motor passed us through the rain, misfiring, carrying a cluster of humanity. A lady in evening dress was cycling along the freshly-tarred road.

Habib's patent-leather shoes uttered piercing cries. On our right we left Putney Common, with its grass worn bare by Saturday cricket matches,

stained with oil from cars undergoing repairs. We reached a brick-built Gothic villa.

At the end of a path, among rustling ivy, an ancient lantern surmounted by a crown of pierced zinc. Heavy curtains. A door, which opened on our arrival. A tight-lipped nurse led us into a hall decorated with a Maori canoe, stands of weapons, assegais, and a sedan-chair turned into a telephone-box. We went up to the first floor, and passed through chintz rooms until we met a strong odour of carbolic.

"Beastly practice," remarked Bibi, above all impressionable.

"She complained all the evening; and then suddenly became silent. I think she has gone to sleep," said the nurse.

A very beautiful young woman, with a skin of wax, her eyes hollow in circles of deep blue, her lips white, lay, stretched motionless in the bed. She appeared not to see us. Habib leant over her.

"She is not yet asleep," he said. "Thank heaven! she mustn't go to sleep or she would not wake up."

I shall never forget Habib. Suddenly very calm. He did not say, "it's nothing," or "it's all

over," or "we must have a consultation." In his tailcoat he walked round the unconscious young woman, from whom life was slipping, at his ease, audacious, neat as a conjurer. A moment of reflection and he removed his coat, tucked up his shirt-sleeve to the shoulder. . . . I can still hear the grating of the button against the cuff, and the cardboard creaking of his shirt-front.

He laid his hand on her forehead, and to my astonishment began to sing. He sang a low, deep, Oriental modulation like those which the blind utter at the doors of the mosques. It came from the throat, sometimes from somewhere deeper, and lasted for minutes on end without his taking breath.

The nurse, Putney and myself had disappeared as in a dream of the East. . . . Nothing remained but that strange priest singing for mercy with ecstatic eyes. Singing . . .

Suddenly, a nightingale. . . .

Habib was puffing; for one short moment he took breath, then began again.

At last he became silent and rose. A smile. The beautiful patient lifted her eyelids. Already life was coming back. He remained motionless, confident in his strength, proud of his vitality, of that energy which made him dare and win, tweak

Death by the nose, send him back home at the end of his boot.

. . . . . .

I sat down, overwhelmed with fatigue, sick at heart. But already Habib was dressed again.

"We must hurry," he said, "I promised the Minister to get back in time for his poker."

PARIS, 1922.